Media release from the Minister - Pilot program to trial support for infants showing early behavioural signs of autism

18 April 2023

The Telethon Kids Institute (TKI) will deliver a pilot program that will examine whether pre-emptive intervention for children showing early behavioural signs of autism, may reduce the level of support required later in life, the Australian Government announced today.

Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) the Hon. Bill Shorten MP said approximately 700 families in Western Australia would be invited to be part of the new pilot.

The program, funded by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), will look at the effects the program has on children aged between 9 and 15 months and benefits over time to a broad cohort of children.

The program is based upon initial research conducted by the Perth-based Telethon Kids Institute with La Trobe University and the West Australian Child and Adolescent Health Service, which yielded promising results.

“Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) affects hundreds of thousands of Australians, many of whom are receiving support through the NDIS, so it’s vital that we continue to look at ways that we can best support children and their families,” Minister Shorten said.

“This pilot will allow us to examine more closely whether earlier intervention can lead to better outcomes for infants and families, including lower levels of support being needed as they grow and develop.

“If the pilot does show that intervening early can assist children to have improved outcomes as they develop, it could provide a new and exciting way in how we support our future generation.”

Previous trial outcomes involving TKI have reported that commencing the program in infancy could reduce early developmental disability to the point where a childhood clinical autism diagnosis was two-thirds less likely.

“The Telethon Kids Institute are experts in this field, having conducted earlier research which demonstrated promising reductions in the severity of symptoms and formal diagnoses of autism,” Minister Shorten said.

“It’s vital we do all in our power to ensure we give our kids their best chance to reach their full potential. I look forward to families taking part in this pilot, and the autism community working together to have their say.”

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