

21 March 2025



MEDIA RELEASE

Outside School Hours Council of Australia calls on the Federal Government to provide adequate support for inclusion support program as part of neurodiversity week

As part of neurodiversity celebration week, the Outside School Hours Council of Australia (OSHCA) is calling on the Federal Government to provide proper and adequate support for the inclusion support program in next week's budget.

Neurodiversity celebration week aims to shed a light on how neurodivergent individuals, including children, are perceived and supported both in and out of the school environment. Some of our most vulnerable children are supported in outside school hours care programs through the government's inclusion support program which aims to help early childhood education and care services address barriers to inclusion and helps children with additional needs to participate in care programs.

Concerningly, the government's inclusion support program has not received indexation since 2018 and despite repeated promises by government over the past 12 months that a new package is under consideration and due for decision, the sector has been left in limbo in relation to the ongoing viability of the program.

Commenting on the ongoing lack of government support for the program, OSHCA President, Warren Jacobson said:

"During neurodiversity week, never has there been a better time to shine a light both on neurodivergent and other vulnerable children attending outside school hours programs but also the inadequacies of the government's commitment and ongoing support of the program.

"We call on the government to ensure that proper support and resourcing is provided to the inclusion support program as part of next week's budget."

OSHCA has advocated tirelessly to raise awareness with government of the critical issues with the program and whilst being advised that the program review has been sitting with government since 2024, the sector is yet to have any indication on the government's plans to stabilise the program.

"The program funding has not been indexed since at least 2018 and as a result, OSHCA members are co-funding the program to the tune of millions of dollars to ensure that neurodivergent children, who require greater support, can attend our services so that their parents can undertake their work or study obligations."

"The financial pressure this is placing on providers is unsustainable, in particular as providers are now also facing losses across many services as a result of the government's new worker retention grant which is not covering the cost of implementing the wage rise to staff."

Without the support of providers, these children would not be in a position to attend outside school hours care services, and their parents would not be able to fulfil their work and study obligations. This has a serious flow on impact on the broader economy.

Angela Branford, Principal at Calvary Lutheran Primary School, reinforced the importance of investing in inclusive OSHC services:

“Increasing funding for OSHC services is essential to create inclusive environments that support neurodivergent children. This investment will enable smoother transitions from school to care, equipping staff with the training and resources needed to address complex needs effectively. By prioritising neuro-affirming practices, we can foster meaningful participation and ensure every child feels supported and valued in their community.”

Laetitia Andrac, co-founder of Understanding Zoe and parent of a neurodivergent child, shared her family’s experience navigating the current system:

“As parents of neurodivergent children, we’ve navigated the challenges in school and Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) firsthand. We know how challenging it can be, even for parents, to support neurodivergent children. While providers invest considerably in inclusion and educators do their best, true inclusion remains out of reach without adequate funding, support and training.”

“Our neurodivergent daughter, Zoe, like so many others, struggled in care settings. The lights, noise, and transitions between spaces often left her dysregulated and distressed. She eventually refused to go altogether, leaving our family without an accessible option for care.”

OSHCA is calling on the Federal Government to provide adequate and proper support to the program to ensure its viability and certainty that care services are available for our most vulnerable students to attend before and after school.

OSHCA members represent approximately 30 per cent of services that are operated on school sites throughout Australia, employing more than 10,000 people. Our sector provides affordable care for the children of over 350,000 Australian families who rely on our services to be able to work & support family needs.

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