



To: The Hon. Mark Butler MP
Minister for Health and Aged Care
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

24th February 2026

Dear Minister,

Re Thriving Kids Initiative in Rural Australia

The Australian Paediatric Society (APS) welcomes the Australian Government's commitment to the Thriving Kids initiative and supports its objective of improving timely, coordinated support for young children with developmental delay and/or autism, particularly in regional, rural and remote communities.

APS recently provided a submission to Parliament outlining how regional and rural consultant paediatricians can support the Thriving Kids model to achieve **best value for public investment and equitable outcomes for families**. Our submission highlighted the role of APS members (general paediatricians) in streamlining pathways, reducing duplication, coordinating care across health, education and social services, and tailoring service delivery to local workforce realities.

We note that the Thriving Kids Model appropriately promotes support in the environments where children live, learn and play, stepped care, early identification, and integration of allied health and community-based services. APS strongly supports these principles and sees a clear opportunity to strengthen implementation by embedding hands on clinical expertise that is already operational in regional systems.

Without direct input from clinicians embedded in regional service networks, there is a **material risk that Thriving Kids pathways may inadvertently increase duplication, delay escalation** for children with complex needs, and **exacerbate inequities** in non-metropolitan communities, particularly where workforce constraints limit service availability. APS members are uniquely placed to mitigate these risks by advising on locally workable pathways that reflect real-world service capacity and family burden. **It should be noted that telehealth options will not suit all, more remote families or those from CALD communities.**

In this context, APS respectfully requests that a representative of the Australian Paediatric Society be appointed as an official member of the Thriving Kids Advisory Committee (or equivalent governance group). Inclusion of **APS would provide practical, system-level insight** into how Thriving Kids can be implemented effectively in non-



metropolitan settings, where fragmentation, long wait times and limited allied health capacity create specific risks to equity and efficiency.

APS members are embedded in regional communities and routinely coordinate across hospital services, general practice, allied health, education and disability supports. This local systems knowledge is not readily accessible to centrally based planners and would support the Advisory Committee to:

- design pathways that minimise duplication and delays,
- ensure stepped-care models function in low-workforce environments,
- optimise use of allied health and NDIS resources,
- reduce unnecessary family travel and disruption,
- strengthen integration between Thriving Kids, mainstream health and GP services and specialist care.

APS is keen to contribute constructively to the Thriving Kids initiative in partnership with Government, consumer organisations and other professional bodies. We would welcome the opportunity to nominate an APS representative with current regional practice experience to support the Advisory Committee's work.

Thank you for your consideration. A rural voice is essential to the design and delivery of this reform. We look forward to continued collaboration to ensure Thriving Kids delivers equitable, practical and sustainable outcomes for children and families across Australia.

Yours sincerely,

Jo McCubbin

President

Australian Paediatric Society

cc: Professor Frank Oberklaid Co-Chair, Thriving Kids Advisory Group

cc Hon Mike Freeland MP

cc Dr Monique Ryan MP