



# Making inclusion a strategic priority for your service



Photo: Welcome to the Fold

**(mainstream) services**, such as ECEC services, in improving the early life outcomes for children with disability

- the *National Quality Framework, Early Years Learning Framework* and the *My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care*, which **embed the principles** of inclusion in ECEC programs (Productivity Commission, 2014; NDIA, n.d.). For example, Elements 3.2.1 and 6.2.2 of the *National Quality Standard* has set a national benchmark to make sure that 'access to inclusion and support assistance is facilitated'.

Each of these factors could be viewed as a sufficient reason for all approved providers, service supervisors and management, and educators to focus on improving access and inclusion of children with disability and complex additional needs. Taken together, these factors make a compelling case for why inclusion should be a strategic priority for ECEC services.

## What is inclusion?

In early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, 'inclusion' refers to the meaningful participation of all children in the curriculum. This means that ECEC services plan and deliver programs and environments that meet the needs of each child, based on educators' knowledge of each child's interests, abilities and preferences.

## Why should inclusion be a strategic priority for ECEC services?

Commonwealth and state anti-discrimination legislation makes it a legal right for children with disability to access and participate in ECEC services. Several other factors are also focusing attention on the inclusion of children with disability, such as:

- research showing that children with disability **may benefit most** from ECEC, but are less likely to attend than their peers (see Information Sheet 1 in this series)
- the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which highlights the **complementary role of universal**

## Making inclusion a strategic priority

Most ECEC services consider access and inclusion to be core principles of service delivery. Services may point to the number of children with disability and children with complex additional needs who are enrolled and who receive additional inclusion support funding. Educators may give examples of how they sought advice from inclusion support providers and other professionals to adjust their program to better meet the needs of each individual child. However, focusing on inclusion as a strategic priority involves more than considering how the service responds, on a case-by-case basis, to the needs of children with disability and children with complex additional needs.

Making inclusion a strategic priority means that an ECEC service focuses on creating an inclusive environment for all children. The ECEC service takes a proactive approach to identifying and removing structural or systemic barriers within the service that may prevent any child (and family) from accessing and participating in the service—including a child with disability or complex additional needs.

## Resources for inclusion

When inclusion is a strategic priority, an ECEC service will gather and allocate sufficient resources to create inclusive policies and practices. Resources (such as funding, time and expertise) may be required to:

- make reasonable adjustments to the program or physical environment
- purchase or borrow additional equipment
- provide transportation
- engage in training and staff development
- review policies
- create partnerships with families
- build networks with other organisations and professionals.

Under the [Kindergarten Inclusion Support Scheme \(KISS\)](#), kindergartens in Queensland can access funding services via their nominated Central Governing Bodies, who administer the funding on behalf of their member services.

The Australian Government's Inclusion Support Program (ISP) for Approved Child Care Providers may offer funding and support to enable ECEC services to find their own solutions to their 'inclusion challenges' (Department of Education and Training [Commonwealth], 2015, p. 3).

## Using a Disability Action Plan

A Disability Action Plan is one tool for creating inclusive policies and practices. Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA), service providers are encouraged to create a Disability Action Plan to eliminate direct and indirect discrimination against people with disability.

The content of a Disability Action Plan will depend on the ECEC service, its context and the community in which it operates. The process of developing the Disability Action Plan will reveal what needs to be included. The DDA sets out the steps in the development of an action plan:

- review current practices to identify barriers to inclusion
- develop policies and practices to eliminate barriers
- set goals and timeframes
- appoint people responsible for implementing the action plan
- evaluate your strategies and monitor progress
- communicate the new strategies within your team (Australian Network on Disability, 2015).

For more detailed advice, see Information Sheet 10—Developing a Disability Action Plan in this series.



Photo: Vicki Yen

ECEC services may choose to submit their Disability Action Plan to the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) for registration. Examples of Disability Action Plans are available from the AHRC [website](#).

## What are the benefits of creating a Disability Action Plan?

A Disability Action Plan is not a legal requirement under the DDA. However, developing and implementing a Disability Action Plan enables ECEC services to take a proactive approach to removing disability discrimination in service delivery. A Disability Action Plan may strengthen your service's:

- capacity to meet its legal obligations under the DDA
- engagement with internal and external stakeholders, including children, their families and local support agencies
- use of early intervention for children with developmental delay
- planning for reasonable adjustments in the short, medium and longer term
- identification of measures that may cause 'unjustifiable hardship'

A Disability Action Plan involves a whole-of-service approach led by the approved provider, service supervisors and management, and educators. The plan will be most effective when the ECEC service's leadership is accountable for the endorsement, allocation of resources and review of the plan.

## Where to find more information

The AHRC has published a useful [guide](#) for businesses and organisations on developing a Disability Action Plan.

## References

Australian Network on Disability. (2016). *What is an Accessibility Action Plan?*

Department of Education and Training (Commonwealth). (2015). *Ministerial Advisory Council Child Care and Early Learning—Inclusion Support Programme update, 18 November 2015*. Canberra: Department of Social Services.

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Productivity Commission. (2014). *Childcare and early childhood learning*. Inquiry report no. 73. Canberra: Productivity Commission.

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