

Better opportunities, better outcomes

Strategic directions for Victorian
services and supports for children
and young people with a disability or
developmental delay and their families

*Every
child,
every
opportunity*



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Ministers' Message

The Victorian Government shares a commitment and responsibility with families, communities and service providers to give all children and young people with a disability or developmental delay the best possible start in life.

All Victorian children and young people should have access to and participate in opportunities that support, promote and protect their optimum health, development, learning, safety and well-being.

Over the past decade, the Victorian Government has significantly increased funding for services for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay.

The development of *Better opportunities, better outcomes – strategic directions for Victorian services and supports for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and their families* further demonstrates the Victorian Government's commitment to achieving meaningful change through detailing a shared vision, new partnerships and a rethink of existing service models.

The strategy outlines a holistic approach to delivering services for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and how those services can be better coordinated across government.

It provides a positive way to improve the quality of life for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and their families; and a more socially inclusive and prosperous society for all.

While much has been achieved to assist Victorian children and young people with a disability or developmental delay, there is more to be done.

These changes will build a much stronger system of services and supports to ensure that all young Victorians thrive, learn, develop and grow.

We look forward to working with you to achieve these visions and outcomes and give every child every opportunity for a healthy and successful future.



Hon Maxine Morand MP

Minister for Children and Early
Childhood Development



Hon Lisa Neville

Minister for Community Services



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1 Introduction

Where rights are respected and effective and timely services are available benefits flow to individuals, to their families and to society at large.

Children and young people with a disability or developmental delay are first and foremost children and young people. They have the same needs, hopes and rights as other children and young people. As they grow, their lives should be defined by their abilities and should not be constrained by community attitudes.

The Victorian community's aspirations for these children and young people are first and foremost those that we have for all children and young people.

The families of these children are as diverse as the whole community. Like all families, they face individual demands and pressures as they raise their child.

The Victorian Government is committed to assisting parents to provide the best start for every child. Our goal is to give every child every opportunity to learn and develop; and to ensure that every child has every chance to thrive, be well-cared for and be safe from harm.

The Government is equally committed to supporting all young people, and their families, during the transition to adult opportunities in work, further education or training.

These commitments are particularly important for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay, who typically face challenges beyond those faced by other children and young people. Families affected by disability face greater financial and time constraints and stresses than those experienced by other families.

The Victorian Government has developed, in collaboration with community agencies, professionals, families, local and Commonwealth government, a range of important services and supports that families can draw upon to offset these pressures, and to widen opportunities for their children.

These services and supports have developed in three main spheres:

- supporting early childhood development and assisting families when a need is identified in infants or emerges in the preschool years
- supporting participation in education and responding to conditions that impair learning
- supporting children or young people with very high needs, where additional resources, care and other forms of support are essential.

The Victorian Government has supported both the expansion and adaptation of these services and supports significantly over the past decade.

Some of these changes are in recognition of the rights of people with a disability, and their need to be an intrinsic part of the broader community and included in – rather than excluded from – general life and community opportunities.

Others reflect the mounting evidence of the benefits of social participation and of early intervention. Research shows that effective early action can significantly enhance the long-term capacity and independence of children and young people with a disability or developmental delay. Supporting their family and carers is vital to that task.

Where rights are respected and effective and timely services are available, benefits flow to individuals, to their families and to society at large.

A new approach

This paper represents a new step in Victorian planning for these services: a more holistic, life-cycle approach to the diverse and changing needs of children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and to the needs of their families.

This new approach reflects the findings of recent service reviews and consultations undertaken around each of the three major clusters of support listed above. It has been informed by the direct experience of parents and families, and young people themselves.

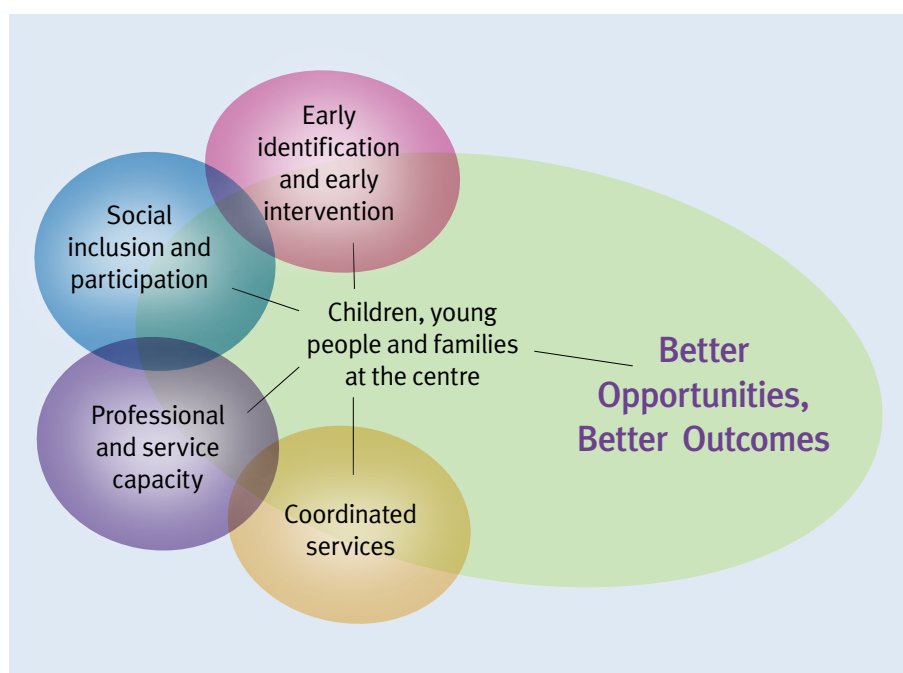
This new approach also reflects the need for collaboration between different levels of government, so that 'siloed' services do not create obstacles, or impede the best use of the range of services and supports in place.

A whole-of-government approach instead offers an opportunity to align services; share knowledge and understanding; streamline systems to benefit parents; and expand the range of professionals who can contribute to improving outcomes for these children and young people.

A shared vision and a commitment to common outcomes are central to this approach. This approach also provides a basis for building links, not just across Victoria, but with emerging national approaches in which the Victorian Government is playing a significant role.

Taking account of the range of services already in place, as well as current challenges, this paper outlines the strategic directions that the Government sees as essential for the range of supports planned, funded or delivered by the Victorian Government to support the learning, development and broader participation needs of children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and their families.

These strategic directions fall into five broad areas:



Together, these directions will deliver better opportunities and achieve better outcomes for this important group of children, young people and their families.

The Victorian Government will plan and stage these directions in consultation with young people, parents and professionals, and in partnership with services and staff over the coming years, in keeping with its broader policy commitments.

Scope

This strategic directions paper is focused on children and young people, up to 18 years of age, with a disability or developmental delay.

Some of the approaches and strategies may also be relevant for young adults (up to age 24). Others may also be relevant to children and young people with additional needs arising from chronic health conditions, mental illness or developmental delay.

Legislative and policy context

Over the last 10 years there have been significant policy and legislative developments in Victoria. Government policy reflects the approaches and commitments of Growing Victoria Together and A Fairer Victoria, which recognise the importance of quality health, education and community services to the whole Victorian community and the need for specific action to redress or prevent disadvantage.

Australia was one of the first countries to sign the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* in July 2008. This now provides Victoria with an overarching, legally binding convention within which service and sector reform can occur.

Legislation relevant to this area includes:

- the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* that sets out principles to guide service development, planning and delivery for children, young people and families, including the prime role of parents
- the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* that reinforces the need for particular attention to the rights of people with a disability
- the *Disability Act 2006* that provides a platform for a whole-of-government response to the needs of people with a disability to maximise participation in community life and social inclusion.

The relevant policy context is comprehensive. The *Victorian State Disability Plan 2002–2012* sets out a clear vision for people with a disability in Victoria and it continues to guide the Government's thinking regarding people with a disability. Other Victorian government policy statements overlapping the plan are designed to drive change in particular parts of the system, or focus on particular groups of children and young people:

- *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development (2008)* sets out the Government's agenda for reform to improve outcomes for all Victorian children, including in early childhood and school settings. The improvements sought apply equally to children with a disability or developmental delay as to all children.

- Because *Mental Health Matters: the Victorian mental health reform strategy 2009–19* is a whole-of-government ten-year plan for mental health. Its vision is that all Victorians have the opportunities they need to maintain good mental health, while those experiencing mental health problems can access timely, high-quality care and support to live successfully in the community.
- *Autism State Plan 2009* builds new and better approaches across government for meeting the growing and complex needs of people with autism and autism spectrum disorders.

A supportive national policy context is also emerging. The Commonwealth Government is working in partnership with state and territory governments to develop a National Disability Strategy. In 2009, it published *The Way Forward – A New Disability Policy Framework for Australia* and *SHUT OUT: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia Consultation Report*. This work has informed the development of the strategic directions for Victorian services and supports for children and young people with a disability of developmental delay and their families presented in this paper.

2 Guiding Vision and Aspirations

The Victorian Government believes that every child deserves the best start in life – to be safe from harm, to optimise their health, learning, development and wellbeing and to achieve their aspirations.

Parents are assisted in their efforts to provide the best start by their wider family networks, other carers and – more broadly – through supports provided by government on behalf of the broader community.

Families with children and young people with a disability or developmental delay require additional, and sometimes very specific, assistance to raise their children. The value of this assistance is evident in the extent to which these children and young people are able to fulfil their potential, benefiting from the opportunities that all children and young people deserve.

Vision for the future

All Victorian children and young people with a disability or developmental delay:

- actively participate, enjoy and learn, along with their peers, in care and education settings and prepare for an active adulthood
- belong to supportive and inclusive communities
- are cared for effectively by families and carers who choose, and benefit from, the services and supports they need.

The Victorian Government's role in achieving this vision is to:

- resource and support parents in their efforts
- lead the development of the health and community services they need, by ensuring services are capable of responding to diversity and individuality
- ensure that early childhood and education settings can, and do, actively include children and young people with a disability or developmental delay
- actively engage and listen to children, young people and their families, and
- support local communities to positively recognise and value the contribution children and young people with a disability or developmental delay make as active community members.

Outcomes

Victorian government action is predicated on the belief that it will improve the outcomes that matter to children and young people, and particularly those outcomes that will shape their future lives.

Table 2.1 lists six broad outcomes that the strategic directions presented in this paper aim to achieve. These outcomes are based on relevant Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Partnership agreements, including the *National Disability Agreement*, *National Education Agreement*, *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy* and the *National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care*.

Table 2.1: Outcomes of strategic directions

1	Children and young people with a disability or developmental delay develop the skills and capabilities to achieve meaningful civic, social and economic participation.
2	Children and young people with a disability or developmental delay enjoy optimal health, wellbeing and quality of life.
3	Children and young people with a disability or developmental delay are engaged in, and benefit from, educational opportunities, achieving improved knowledge and skills.
4	Empowered families and carers access quality services that support the workforce and community participation choices of families.
5	Families and carers are well supported and are confident in their abilities to support their children's learning and development and capacity to live independently.
6	Inclusive communities benefit from the contribution that children and young people with a disability or developmental delay make and will make into the future.

Performance indicators will be developed to monitor the impact of the strategic directions in this statement against these six outcomes. These performance indicators will provide a shared framework for planning and accountability across government portfolios and programs, and between agencies and sectors, drawing mainly on the measures and data collected through the Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System (VCAMS). The Government is committed to systematically gathering data and monitoring how children and young people are faring over the longer term. VCAMS has been developed to collect and report on 35 areas of importance to all children from birth to 18 years, across the domains of safety, health, development, learning and wellbeing; and including the context of the child's family, community and society (see <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/children/vcams/default.htm>).

Children and young people with a disability or developmental delay are recognised by VCAMS as one of four priority populations with limited available data, which require a more tailored approach to data collection if their situation is to be properly understood and monitored. While there have been significant policy and legislative developments in relation to children and young people with a disability or developmental delay, limited robust data exists, both about the prevalence of disability and developmental delay and about the health and wellbeing of this population of children, young people and their families.

A new survey program is being planned to collect data against key indicators for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay. Scoping for a new data collection is underway and, in 2010, will include consultation with relevant stakeholders to assess data gaps and information needs. Knowing the health and wellbeing status of children and young people with a disability or developmental delay, the circumstances of their families, and influences in their local communities, is essential to inform planning – for example, around capacity and service access – and to improve outcomes for these children and young people.

This data development agenda will reflect the goals and aspirations set out in this paper and will assist the Government in understanding the impact that reform has on the outcomes for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay. It will also contribute to the knowledge base available to services and professionals, supporting evidence-based interventions, program and service evaluations and ongoing research.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the outcomes framework for Victorian services and supports for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay, including its vision, outcomes and principles.

Figure 2.1: Outcomes framework for Victorian services and supports for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and their families

VISION		<p>All Victorian children and young people with a disability or developmental delay:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • actively participate, enjoy and learn, along with their peers, in care and education settings and prepare for an active adulthood • belong to supportive and inclusive communities • are cared for effectively by families and carers who choose, and benefit from, the services and supports they need.
OUTCOMES	Children and young people	Children and young people with a disability or developmental delay develop the skills and capabilities to achieve meaningful civic, social and economic participation.
		Children and young people with a disability or developmental delay enjoy optimal health, wellbeing and quality of life.
		Children and young people with a disability or developmental delay are engaged in, and benefit from, educational opportunities, achieving improved knowledge and skills.
	Families and carers	Empowered families and carers access quality services that support the workforce and community participation choices of families
		Families and carers are well supported and confident in their abilities to support their children’s learning and development and capacity to live independently
	Communities	Inclusive communities benefit from the contribution that children and young people with a disability or developmental delay make and will make into the future
PRINCIPLES		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 The best interests of children and young people are paramount 2 Services and supports protect and promote human rights, including the rights of the child and young person with a disability or developmental delay 3 Services and supports adopt a child-and-family-centred approach that promotes choice and opportunity 4 Services and supports are accessible and coordinated to intervene early and adopt a life-cycle approach for the planning and provision of services 5 Services and supports are well integrated to meet the holistic needs of children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and their families 6 Services and supports promote social inclusion 7 Services and supports are accessible and appropriate for children and young people from diverse cultures and their families

Victoria has a strong base in place on which to build a world-class system of support for our children and young people with a disability or developmental delay.

A staged program of change

Victoria has a strong base in place on which to build a world-class system of support for our children and young people with a disability or developmental delay.

Over the past 10 years, there has been significant investment in the three major areas through which services and supports are made available: Early Childhood Intervention Services, Program for Students with Disabilities and Specialist Schools, and Disability Services.

Reform will be most effective if undertaken in the context of a longer-term vision and agreed outcomes. This paper highlights the areas of reform required to develop a system of provision and support, organised around the needs of children and young people, in the context of their families and communities. It maps out the proposed reform agenda to deliver a comprehensive and effective system of support for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay.

We are taking a ten-year outlook, with a view to action key reform areas over the next five years (2010–15), with full implementation and integration into the service system being achieved over the following five years (2015–20). This approach will require reforming the way that the existing system is organised across government and non-government agencies for children, young people and their families.

A staged approach to reform will assist in understanding the steps required to increase the capacity of mainstream health and community services to identify and respond to issues relating to children and young people with a disability or developmental delay. It will allow for the reframing, modification and improvement of targeted services and supports for these children and young people and provide the time required to enable workforce capacity to keep pace with service growth.

Principles

The strategic directions in this paper, which build on existing publications¹ and research, are based on the following service principles:

1. The best interests of children and young people are paramount

Children and young people with a disability or developmental delay have aspirations and goals. Services should put the best interests of children and young people first and seek to support them to meet their aspirations and goals. Achieving this requires a focus on safety, stability, learning and development; as well as the supports necessary to enable positive relationships between children, parents and families.

2. Services and supports protect and promote human rights, including the rights of the child and young person with a disability or developmental delay

All services and supports recognise the rights of children and young people with a disability to an inclusive society that will enable them to realise their potential.

All services protect and promote the human rights of children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and encourage their participation in any decision-making affecting their lives.

¹ *Statement of principles for children and young people with a disability and their families* (2009), which guides the delivery of services and supports funded or provided by Disability Services (http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/381918/cis_statement_of_principles_pdf_191109.pdf).

Inclusion in all aspects of life for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay is a precondition for them to achieve their aspirations and life goals.

All services recognise the rights of parents, their expertise and understanding of their child, their experience of providing care, their commitment to their child's best interests, and their responsibility to decide on health, care or education options.

3 Services and supports adopt a child-and-family-centred approach that promotes choice and opportunity

Children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and their families are best placed to know what mix of services and supports are likely to meet their needs. Services should be based on the priorities of children and young people and their families, responding to the particular stage of the child's or young person's development.

A child-and-family-centred approach based on a partnership between parents and professionals should maximise the choices and opportunities available to children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and their families.

4 Services and supports are accessible and coordinated to intervene early and adopt a life-cycle approach to the planning and provision of services

Support in mainstream services and targeted interventions are planned and designed to provide timely intervention for children, young people and their families to optimise child development and build family resilience.

Early intervention, both in a child's early years and in terms of early detection and identification of emerging need, is central to support for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and their families. Services and supports need to reflect their evolving needs as they move from infancy to childhood, adolescence and into young adulthood.

5 Services and supports are integrated to meet the holistic needs of children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and their families

The needs of children and young people with a disability or developmental delay require close collaboration within and between mainstream and specialist services. Better integration of services will provide a more holistic response to the needs of the child or young person and lead to more effective intervention and better outcomes.

Services should be alert to the holistic needs of children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and provide a coordinated service response where necessary.

6 Services and supports promote social inclusion

Inclusion in all aspects of life for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay is a precondition for them to achieve their aspirations and life goals. These children and young people have a significant contribution to make to society; and the supports and services they receive should help to ensure that the community benefits from their contribution.

7 Services and supports are accessible and appropriate for children, young people from diverse cultures and their families

Services and supports need to be culturally accessible and sensitive to the particular needs of Aboriginal children and young people, and those from the wide range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds in the Victorian community. Where appropriate, extended families and the community are involved in decision-making about services and supports.



3 Strengths and Challenges

Victoria has a continuum of universally available services for children and young people from birth to adulthood. These services include the Maternal and Child Health Service, playgroups, kindergarten, school and further education, community health services and hospitals. Some key services, such as child care and general practitioners, are funded by the Commonwealth Government. For most children, their education, care and health needs are met within these high-quality mainstream services.

Victorian services and supports

Additional services and supports are provided for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay. There are three core program areas provided by the Victorian Government through the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Department of Human Services:

- Early Childhood Intervention Services
- Program for Students with Disabilities and Specialist Schools, and
- Disability Services.

Early Childhood Intervention Services

Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS) support children with a disability or developmental delay and their families from birth to school entry. ECIS provide special education, therapy, counselling, service planning and coordination, assistance and support to access services such as kindergarten and child care. ECIS include kindergarten inclusion support services, which provide support and professional services to children with additional needs and disabilities to improve their access and participation in funded kindergarten programs. ECIS also includes Preschool Field Officers who facilitate the access and participation of children with additional needs in funded kindergarten programs by providing advice, information and resources.

The aim of these services is to provide parents and families with the knowledge, skills and support they require to meet the needs of their child and to optimise the child's development and ability to participate in family and community life.

The Government invested \$60.3 million in ECIS in the 2009–10 State Budget. This funding provided ECIS to approximately 12,500 children from birth to school entry and 505 flexible support packages to supplement ECIS with additional short term supports. Over 950 children with severe disabilities received kindergarten inclusion support and more than 6500 children with additional needs received Preschool Field Officer services to support their participation in kindergarten.

Supports for Students with Disabilities in mainstream and specialist schools

The Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD) aims to maximise student potential growth in education and learning, so that students with disabilities are valued and participate in all aspects of school life, consistent with optimal and relevant goals and aspirations. In 2010, the program provided additional resources to Victorian government schools to support delivery of educational programs for more than 20,000 eligible students in the categories of physical disability, visual impairment, severe behaviour disorder, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder, and severe language disorder with critical educational needs. The Government is investing \$490.2 million in PSD in 2010, including \$31 million for the Language Support Program.

There are 81 government-funded specialist schools across Victoria, including special and special developmental schools to support students with physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities, autism or hearing impairments, and hospital schools to support students with severe behavioural and emotional disorders. This includes five autism-specific schools, four hospital schools, and three deaf schools. The department also has a network of school buses to transport eligible students to special school locations. Of the total number of specialist schools, 16 provide early education programs for pre-school age children with disabilities. In addition, 17 deaf facilities are attached to regular primary and secondary government schools.

The Victorian government also provides support for students with disabilities attending non-government schools. As part of the 2010-2013 Victorian Non-Government Schools Funding Agreement, the Government announced a funding commitment to Catholic and Independent schools of \$2.1 billion over four years.

Disability Services

This program funds and provides a range of supports and services for people of all ages with intellectual, physical, sensory and neurological impairments and acquired brain injury.

Support for children and young people aged up to 18 years and their families is tailored to their individual needs and life stage. Supports include information provision, planning, case management, aids and equipment, respite, behaviour intervention, transition to employment and individual packages of support that can provide a combination of supports tailored to individual needs.

Other supports

In addition to these core programs, there are other programs relevant to the achievement of the strategic directions outlined in this paper.

The Student Support Service Program in Victorian government schools improves the capacity of schools to meet the additional learning and wellbeing needs of children and young people through providing access to school and community specialist support. Student support services staff include visiting teachers, psychologists, guidance officers, speech pathologists, social workers and other allied health professionals. They work with the families of children who are vulnerable or have additional needs to improve learning and wellbeing outcomes.

Disability Liaison Officers at each of Victoria's 18 TAFE institutes assist students with a disability or ongoing medical condition to access and fully participate in education and training. They also provide information and advice on facilities and services available at the TAFE institute.

Many children and young people with a disability or developmental delay will also have significant health issues and need to access a range of health services, including acute health, mental health and community health services.

Finally, the Commonwealth Government provides for related services, notably inclusion support for various forms of child care and disability employment services.

Current challenges

Over the last decade the Victorian Government, in partnership with families, Commonwealth Government and local government, service providers and the broader community, has taken significant steps towards maximising opportunities for children and young people with disabilities to participate in all aspects of community life.

Published research, the expressed views and policies of advocacy organisations and the direct views of families and young people have identified a number of challenges that are still to be addressed.

Services not sufficiently focused on children, young people and their families

Children, young people and their families' experiences of existing services are that they are often designed around program guidelines and service structures, and have limited flexibility to meet the priorities of children, young people and their families.

Many service providers have reoriented practice and programs to recognise and support parents and families, and to focus on the needs of the individual child or young person, rather than their disability; and some resources are available for direct use by families rather than being directed through professionals. Despite this progress, there is scope to increase flexibility in the use of available resources to best match the diverse and changing needs of children and young people and their families.

Delayed identification and intervention

Victoria's universally available services, such as hospitals and maternal and child health services, provide a strong platform for the early identification of developmental problems. Recent years have seen important efforts to update and broaden professional knowledge to strengthen early identification. This work will continue in future years. At the same time, improved rates of autism identification, increases in the prevalence of certain disabilities, together with pressures due to higher birth rates, have increased the demand on existing services, especially early childhood intervention services. This can lead to delays in families accessing quality early intervention services.

Barriers to access and participation

There have been recent gains made in reducing the barriers to access and participation in community life and mainstream services, but further progress needs to be made. Sometimes these barriers reflect broader availability constraints affecting the community in a time of rapid population growth – for example, difficulties finding local child care – compounded by parents' need to be confident that the service suits their child. Time lags in gaining support can also be a factor.

Under-developed workforce

A skilled and competent workforce is vital to progressing change. The current workforce is already facing skills shortages and challenges in maintaining up-to-date professional knowledge in rapidly changing areas. In order to support children and young people with a disability or developmental delay to access universal services all professionals require specific skills with children and young people.

Navigating the maze

The Victorian mainstream and specialist system has significant strengths which are acknowledged by stakeholders. However, there is still a sense by many parents, of a fragmented service system which leads to difficulties accessing timely and appropriate services. Coordination across and between mainstream and specialist services, and support to manage the range of services to meet an individual's needs both require improvement. While families' experience with individual services may be positive they report the need to continuously advocate in relation to service coordination and transition between services. Families with few resources, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, or those under stress in other ways, may benefit from extra support as a result.



4 Areas for Reform

Effective prioritisation and response to needs should form the basis for the organisation of service delivery and assessment of its effectiveness.

Reform of services for Victorian children and young people with a disability or developmental delay will focus on how to respond better to their needs in the context of their families and communities. Effective prioritisation and response to needs should form the basis for the organisation of service delivery and assessment of its effectiveness.

The purposes of reform are to:

- support children and young people with a disability or developmental delay, and their families and carers, to develop their abilities and participate fully in the community, and
- promote acceptance and celebrate difference as part of a holistic approach to social inclusion.

A more integrated approach to service delivery across service systems is necessary to better meet the needs of children and young people with a disability or developmental delay. It also requires some shift in the role of professionals from that of expert provider of intervention to facilitating optimal learning and development and building partnerships with, families, communities and mainstream service providers to support the inclusion of children and young people with a disability or developmental delay. This is achieved through providing information, advice and direct intervention where appropriate.

A staged program of change to build on Victoria's strengths, adapt to new evidence and new challenges, and embed the key principles into service design and practice will be undertaken in five main areas.

Areas for reform

1	Children, young people and families at the centre
2	Early identification and intervention
3	Social inclusion and participation
4	Professional and service capacity
5	Co-ordinated services

The following pages outline the Victorian Government's progress under each of the reform areas, and propose the directions that it intends to take to continue to improve outcomes for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay.

1. Children, young people and families at the centre

What we know

We know that families play the key role in the lives of children and young people with a disability or developmental delay, and that families who are supported in this role cope much better.

For young people seeking greater independence, the role of the family in decision-making is balanced with the capacity of the young person to assert their right to be involved in the decisions that affect them.

Casestudy

The Parent Education And Skills Training program

The Parent Education And Skills Training program: for parents of pre-school children with autism was delivered by the Autism Secondary Consultation and Training Strategy (ACT-NOW). The training provided parents with an opportunity to observe and learn behavioural intervention strategies most relevant to children with autism that would assist them in supporting their young children.

In 2006, the Irabina Early Childhood Autism Service offered the program to all new families at the start of their early childhood intervention services (ECIS). Six groups were run, with more than 25 families completing the program. All participants felt that the program should be offered to all families in the service.

What we have done

The Victorian Government has:

- Implemented the Assistance with Planning Pilot for Disability Services in three regions of the Department of Human Services. The target group for this comprehensive planning approach includes children and young people where there is a need to support and maintain the care-giving relationships; young people who are transitioning from school; and children and young people who are leaving care
- Developed the *On-Line Parent Resource*, which provides parents of young people with disabilities with information about pathways to employment, further education and training (see <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/sensecyouth/careertrans/careersandplanning.htm>)
- Developed a *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework* to advance children's learning and development from birth to 8 years
- Provided 1000 additional Early Childhood Intervention Services places since 2008–09
- Launched a communiqué, *What is my future? Review of Deaf Education* which includes five areas for reform to improve the educational outcomes for deaf and hard of hearing students. An initial action arising from the review was the provision of 48 netbook computers for deaf and hard of hearing Year 5 students from across specialist and regular schools
- Funded the *Association for Children with a Disability* to provide information and support for families and carers across Victoria who have a child or young person with a disability or developmental delay
- Funded the *Supported Playgroup and Parents Group Initiative* in 30 local government areas. This initiative includes funding for playgroups and parent groups for children with a disability or developmental delay and their families
- Provided funding to the Royal Children's Hospital for a family support position; and additional funding to Taralye, the oral language centre for hearing impaired and deaf children, to provide support to very young children and their families recently diagnosed with a hearing impairment and their families
- Provided flexible supports tailored to individual needs through the provision of individual support packages based on child-and-family-centred planning
- Established Student Support Groups, which are planning partnerships between parents, students and the school for children and young people with disabilities
- Launched the *Strengthening care for children with a life-threatening condition*, a policy framework outlining family-centred principles upon which the care of infants, children and young people with a life-threatening condition is based (see <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/palliativecare/strengthencare-policy.pdf>)
- Undertaken a review of respite services and access to aids and equipment for children with a life-threatening condition
- Launched the *Autism State Plan* in 2009, which includes guiding principles specifically recognising that people with an autism spectrum disorder and their families have valuable knowledge, experience and perspectives that should be used in developing services (see <http://autismstateplan.dhs.vic.gov.au/>).

What we want to see

- 1 Children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and their families are at the centre of support and planning to meet their support needs.
- 2 Parents are in control of their circumstances and acknowledged as experts regarding their children and are able to effectively partner with professionals in the care and support of their child.
- 3 Young people are supported to make decisions about their lives.

Our directions are towards

1 Supporting families from the first.

Provide support to families at the point of identification and at critical stages throughout the life cycle. As a first step, tools and resources for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and their families will be developed to enhance capacity to take more control of planning.

2 Empowering families through helpful information.

Improve access to information regarding services and supports for children and young people with autism spectrum disorder and their families. This is a key action in the 2009 *Autism State Plan*. In schools, the provision of targeted curriculum material and indicators of progress will enable parents and students to recognise learning achievements and actively contribute to educational planning.

3 Easing pressures on families and carers.

Expand carer support options and the range of relevant parenting programs available to families to assist in meeting their diverse and changing needs. Initially, the focus will be on exploring opportunities to improve access to respite services and aids and equipment for children with a life-threatening condition and their families.

4 Providing flexible support to meet parents, children and young people's priorities.

Continue to provide tailored supports through flexible support packages. These packages will complement mainstream and other community services and strengthen self-directed approaches to planning.

5 Widening families' options by supporting local schools to meet the needs of children and young people with a disability or developmental delay, and providing innovative models of service delivery.

Continue to extend the capacity of mainstream schools to support these children and young people.

6 Supporting young people as they move to post-school options.

Increase the advice and support available to schools, families and young people as they plan for adulthood. This initiative includes providing materials for a range of stakeholders that guide each young person to develop beyond school to their fullest extent possible.

7 Knowing how children, young people and families affected by disability or developmental delay are faring.

Little is known at a population level about the general health and wellbeing of children and young people with a disability or developmental delay, or the extent to which their families face different pressures from Victorian families generally. As part of the Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System, a new data collection will be developed to survey families and young people affected by disability. This data collection will be designed to address data gaps to improve monitoring and evaluation of outcomes for children and young people with a disability or a developmental delay and their families, and so facilitate the planning of services to better meet their needs.

8 Implementing the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework.

The framework advances children's learning and development from birth to eight years and provides a key opportunity to build a common understanding and approach to the inclusion of children with a disability or developmental delay in Victorian education and care settings.

2. Early identification and intervention

What we know

We know that children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and their families need a system that identifies children and young people with additional needs and intervenes early.

Specialist services are seeing an increase in demand not previously experienced, which can be attributed to a range of factors. There is emerging evidence that child disability is becoming more commonly identified as a result of incidence rates increasing; changes in assessment/diagnostic trends; and the increased awareness of particular disabilities, including autism spectrum disorder. There has also been a rise in births in Victoria, with a 21 per cent increase over the past 10 years.

Earlier identification can also increase the length of time that a child or young person with a disability or developmental delay and their family require support, increasing the demand for services. Many children and young people with a disability or developmental delay have their needs identified early, receive appropriate supports and interventions, their families receive appropriate supports and they progress and develop well. Others however, do not have their needs identified as early as they should.

What we have done

The Victorian Government has:

- Implemented the Maternal and Child Health Service Key Ages and Stages Framework to undertake 10 key age-and-stage visits from birth to 3.5 years. These visits provide information, support and assessment, and use validated tools to elicit parental concern and undertake further standardised developmental assessments as required. Where children are identified as at risk of poor outcomes, further support is provided through the Enhanced Maternal and Child Health service and referral to other agencies
- Launched the *Autism State Plan* in 2009 (see <http://autismstateplan.dhs.vic.gov.au/>)
- Implemented the child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) wait-list reduction project to reduce waiting times for autism spectrum disorder assessments in CAMHS
- Undertaken the *Review of Deaf Education 2009*.

Casestudy

Neonatal Hearing Screening

Neonatal hearing screening was introduced in Victoria in 2005. In 2010 the Victorian Government funded a family support position to provide parents of babies identified with potential hearing impairment following birth and those infants later diagnosed with a permanent hearing impairment with early support; and information about the diagnosis, methods to help their child, and the supports available to families.

This program aims to alleviate the anxiety parents feel in the early days following diagnosis. It also equips them with the knowledge and confidence to assist their children to reach their potential.

What we want to see

The Victorian Government envisions an improved capability to identify additional needs and intervene earlier, both earlier in the life of children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and early when needs arise. This will result in earlier access to the supports that will assist them to achieve their full potential, and provide them with opportunities to achieve their goals and aspirations. This improved capacity, and consequent improved outcomes, for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay, could be achieved through life-stage planning, building individual and family capabilities and sustaining these capabilities throughout the life course.

Our directions are towards

9 Enhancing early identification to ensure more timely support.

Continue professional and system development to maintain coverage and take advantage of new evidence and identification tools. In the first instance, this aim will be advanced through the implementation of relevant recommendations of the 2009 *Autism State Plan*, particularly under the first priority area of ‘making it easier to get support’.

10 Skilling professionals in mainstream services to encourage early identification.

Provide access to professional development and services for workers in early childhood, schools and other mainstream services to improve early identification of disability or developmental delay. The first step will be to consolidate Maternal and Child Health nurse training to improve early identification through the roll-out of the Maternal and Child Health Service Key Ages and Stages Framework.

11 Implementing the recommendations of the 2009 *Review of Deaf Education*.

Build family partnerships, improve collaboration and strengthen workforce capacity to improve learning and wellbeing outcomes for all deaf and hard-of-hearing children and young people from the point of identification through the school years.

12 Identifying issues and needs for school leavers.

Enhance mechanisms for early identification of school leavers’ needs as they transition from school to adult opportunities. Improvement to existing mechanisms for collecting destination data about all young people with disabilities will be a critical first step in identifying the required supports.

We know that children with a disability or developmental delay and their families have needs in common with all children and their families.

3. Social inclusion and participation

What we know

We know that children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and their families have needs in common with all children and young people and their families. Communities also benefit when they are able to support the needs of all children and young people and their families. Meeting these shared needs should be a focus for policies, funding and planning in early childhood services,² schools and disability services.

Research³ in the context of school education finds that well supported inclusive education confers significant psychological advantages for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay, as well as greater fulfilment of intellectual learning, social and emotional needs. Beyond school, economic participation and social inclusion are also improved.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities puts the responsibility on society to ensure that all people must be provided with opportunities to reach their potential, regardless of their situation or disabilities.⁴

What we have done

The Victorian Government has:

- Implemented Disability Action Plans in all Victorian government departments to progress the four outcome areas set out in the *Disability Act 2006*. These relate to:
 - reducing barriers for people with a disability accessing goods, services and facilities
 - making it easier to obtain and retain employment
 - promoting inclusion and participation in the community, and
 - achieving tangible changes in attitudes and practices that discriminate against persons with a disability
- Released the *Statement of principles for children and young people with a disability and their families* in 2009. This document articulates the specific vision, principles and actions that will guide Disability Services in providing supports to children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and their families. The principles emphasise social inclusion, highlighting that people with a disability or developmental delay should have every opportunity to participate as fully as possible in the community (see <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/disability/publications-library/the-statement-of-principles-for-children-and-young-people-with-a-disability-and-their-families>)

² Department of Education and Early Children 2009, DEECD Early Childhood Intervention Reform Project: Literature review (<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/earlychildhood/intervention/ed-intervention-literature-review.pdf>)

³ Ofsted 2006, Inclusion: does it matter where pupils are taught? <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Education/Inclusion/Special-educational-needs>
European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education
<http://www.european-agency.org/publications/ereports>

⁴ Department of Planning and Community Development 2008, A United Step Forward: A Guide to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (http://www.officefordisability.vic.gov.au/docs/A_United_Step_Forward_Guide_UN_Convention_Rights_of_Persons_with_Disabilities.pdf)

- Developed the *Bar None Community Awareness Kit* for Schools in 2009, which is a suite of community awareness resources for all government, Catholic and Independent schools in Victoria, targeting teachers of Prep to Year 8 students. The resources include curriculum units mapped to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards; a professional development module, a teacher information booklet; and a DVD featuring real-life stories about students with a disability, their families, teachers and principals. The resources form the basis for a campaign aimed at increasing teachers' and students' awareness of people with a disability and of the societal barriers that prevent them from fully participating in the community and achieving their potential (see http://www.officefordisability.vic.gov.au/bar_none_kit_for_schools.htm)
- Established children's centres and new kindergartens in multi-use facilities in Victoria. These facilities promote an inclusive, integrated and collaborative approach to early years activities and are making a difference for families of children with a disability or developmental delay
- Introduced the Transition to Employment (TTE) initiative in 2009 as part of the Futures for Young Adults program, to assist school leavers with a disability to develop the skills, capacity and work experience required to facilitate access to employment
- Released *The Community Building Program in Disability Services: Supporting self-directed lifestyles for Victorians with a disability* in 2009 (see http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/360476/cis_cboverview_pdf_o809.pdf)
- Continued to implement a community-building program in which MetroAccess, RuralAccess and deafaccess workers are employed in local communities to facilitate place-based integrated planning to develop new ways of including people with a disability in local community life
- Allocated 50 additional Kindergarten Inclusion Support packages to support children with a severe disability to access kindergarten in 2009, and another 60 in 2010, to increase the total number of packages available for young children with complex needs across Victoria to 704 packages.

Case study

Andrew is a young adult who has an intellectual disability who lives in metropolitan Melbourne with his parents.

Through planning conducted via the Managed Individual Pathways initiative, Andrew identified that his main goal once he left school was to go to TAFE to complete Certificate I in Work-Readiness, with the long-term goal of getting a job in hospitality.

In his final year of school, a DHS transition planner was engaged through the Transition to Employment (TTE) initiative to help him to plan for further training and employment, and build the knowledge, skills and work-experience he would need to make the next step. Based on Andrew's goals and aspirations, the transition planner put together a plan and began to put it into action with Andrew.

The transition planner arranged for Andrew to meet with the TAFE advisor to discuss potential options for completing his preferred course. Unfortunately, the TAFE felt that Andrew did not have the necessary independence and social skills to successfully complete a TAFE course at that time.

Andrew and his family were disappointed at this outcome but, with the help of the transition planner, he was referred to a TTE provider who agreed to support him to develop his confidence, his independence and social skills with the goal to being accepted at TAFE.

Although Andrew was provided with funding for up to twelve months through TTE, the TTE provider made a referral to the TAFE on Andrew's behalf after only six months as they considered that Andrew had developed the necessary skills to complete his chosen TAFE course. This time, the TAFE accepted Andrew into the course.

Andrew is now attending TAFE and, through the supports the TTE provider was able to give him, he has also secured part-time work in the hospitality field. The TTE provider has continued to support Andrew at work for a limited period, but will soon refer him to a Commonwealth Disability Employment Service to continue to support Andrew so that he can sustain his employment in the long term.

What we want to see

- 1 Children and young people with a disability or developmental delay are accessing all aspects of community life, including high-quality health and education services.
- 2 Parents and carers feel supported and engaged to enable the participation of their child in the life of the community.
- 3 Children and young people are exercising choice about their participation in their community.

Our directions are towards

13 Ensuring that all Government Disability Action Plans share a common focus on inclusion for children and young people.

Initial steps in this direction include:

- advancing social inclusion and participation for children and young people across all government departments, through mechanisms such as Disability Action Plans
- continuing to train health and community organisations in the development, implementation and review of Disability Action Plans.

Disability Action Plans provide practical strategies to promote the inclusion of all people with a disability, including children and young people.

14 Developing new facilities and community hubs that provide a strong local model of inclusive practice.

Children's centres funded by the Victorian Government since 2007–08 have been required to include the provision of early childhood intervention services as part of their service model. These centres provide an opportunity for further strengthening inclusive practices across mainstream and specialist services.

Building and maintaining a skilled workforce and workforce culture that emphasises empowerment, community inclusion and active support will enable children and young people and their families to achieve their aspirations.

15 Strengthening and aligning inclusion support programs.

Building on the Victorian Government's *Transition: A Positive Start to School* initiative, support programs for children with disabilities and developmental delay in Victorian kindergartens and government schools will be aligned to further assist children and their families through this important transition. An important first step will be to track pathways and supports for children with significant disabilities and high-support needs on leaving kindergarten and moving into other educational settings.

16 Improving the inclusiveness of educational settings for all children and young people.

Initial steps in progressing this direction include:

- establishing localised support options and enhancing the use of digital and assistive technology in schools – to begin improving access and participation of children and young people with a disability or developmental delay in schooling and their local communities
- supporting early childhood services and schools to create more inclusive environments for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and their families – ensuring parents have information and access to a broad range of options when it comes to finding a place for their child.
- extending the professional learning and training opportunities for mainstream teachers and support personnel to build knowledge and capacity in developing more inclusive whole-school and classroom learning environments.

17 Strengthening school leavers' pathways to employment, education, training and meaningful adult activities

Continue to implement the statewide Transition to Employment (TTE) initiative to facilitate pathways to employment for school leavers with a disability.

18 Enhance the inclusion and participation of Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse children and young people with disabilities in educational and community life.

The development of the *Victorian Plan for Aboriginal Children and Young People* (2010–2020) will inform decision making about future strategies to ensure that all Aboriginal children and young people are included in the state's educational and community life.

The Victorian Government will continue to target children and their families who may, for a range of reasons, under utilise or have difficulties accessing universally available early childhood services and support. The *Best Start Program* and *Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups* initiative targets indigenous children and their families or carers, culturally and linguistically diverse children and their families, disadvantaged families with complex needs and children and families affected by disability.

4. Professional and service capacity

What we know

We know that if we are to realise our high expectations for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay, Victoria will need a highly skilled, professional workforce that supports the health, learning and development of all Victorian children and young people.

Building and maintaining a skilled workforce and workforce culture that emphasises empowerment, community inclusion and active support will enable children and young people and their families to achieve their aspirations. Furthermore, the development of a leadership culture within the workforce will provide the environment for continuous improvement and enhanced workforce capabilities to meet the challenges identified in this paper.

What we have done

The Victorian Government has:

- Released *Partnering for the Future: The Victorian Industry Development Plan for the provision of support for people with a disability* in 2006
- Launched the *Workforce Strategy: Improving supports for people with a disability 2008–2013 and beyond* in 2009 to support the Victorian Industry Development Plan (VIDP) and further build industry capacity to respond to the changing support needs of people with a disability (see http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/336596/quality_idpworkforcestrategyoverview_pdf_0409.pdf)
- Developed the *Language Support Program Professional Learning Guide* (2009), a resource designed to assist teachers and schools in providing appropriate assessment and pedagogy for students with language disorders and delays (see <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/lsp/proflearnguide.htm>)
- Provided scholarships and incentives for professionals to work in early childhood intervention services
- Released an early childhood workforce strategy, *Improving Victoria's Early Childhood Workforce*, which includes a range of supports for early childhood intervention professionals (see <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/govrel/Policy/ecworkforce.pdf>)
- Provided resources and training to continue to support disability service providers to effectively implement the Quality Framework for Disability Services
- Strengthened the Student Support Services Officers Program, through additional staffing, workforce enhancement and improved accountability and performance reporting arrangements
- Established the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Children and Young People with Disabilities and Additional Learning Needs to provide expert advice on improving support for children and young people with disabilities
- Implemented the Autism Secondary Consultation and Training Strategy (ACT-NOW) to build the skills and capacity of early childhood practitioners across Victoria to meet the needs of young children with autism and strengthen partnerships between services and families.
- Developed trial materials, including *Curriculum Advice: Working Towards Level One of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards* for students with intellectual disabilities and additional learning needs

Casestudy

Alison is in Grade 1 in a primary school in suburban Melbourne. Alison rarely spoke in class and her reading levels were behind the class average. Recently her teacher had observed Alison becoming less interested in participating in classroom activities. Since the start of term 2, Alison's school attendance record had also deteriorated. After discussing the matter with the parents and gaining their consent, Alison's teacher raised these matters with the primary welfare officer at the school who contacted the Student Support Services Network team for advice.

A referral to Student Support Services led to an assessment by a speech pathologist and follow up language support. One of the team's social workers was also consulted about strategies to address attendance and engagement issues. The speech pathologist and the social worker were able to provide advice to the classroom teacher and the parents on strategies they could use to support Alison's speech and language development and re-engagement at school. With ongoing support and assistance by family members and some re-adjustment of Alison's teaching and learning program, Alison has started to make progress in reading, re-engagement in classroom activities and improved school attendance.

Families are more likely to feel supported and report that services better meet their needs, particularly at times of transition, if services are well co-ordinated and integrated.

What we want to see

- 1 A suitably skilled and qualified mainstream and specialist workforce in place throughout Victoria.
- 2 Quality assurance mechanisms in place in agencies working with children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and with their families to ensure high-quality and effective service delivery.
- 3 Family-centred practice as a key principle underpinning practice across age cohorts.

Our directions are towards

19 Providing quality services informed by the best available evidence.

Initial steps in progressing this direction include:

- development of a quality assurance framework for early childhood intervention services, incorporating revised program standards and an evaluation and performance monitoring system
- development and implementation of an Abilities Index to put teaching and learning at the centre of the Program for Students with Disabilities. Implementing this commitment will also involve providing curriculum support and materials and strategies for teachers working with children and young people with a disability or developmental delay.

20 Providing access to professional development.

Initial steps in progressing this direction include:

- augmenting skills in family-centred practice through the development of family-centred practice guidelines for disability services staff and other relevant specialist practitioners working with children and young people and their families
- strengthening the Autism Spectrum Disorder expertise of the workforce through ongoing implementation of relevant actions in the *Autism State Plan*
- developing professional development programs that build on the Early Childhood Intervention Practitioner Competencies 2009
- providing teachers with targeted scholarships to build specialist knowledge and skills related to children and young people with a disability or developmental delay.

21 Implementing workforce strategies to recruit and retain suitably skilled and experienced professionals.

An initial focus will be on continuing to expand early childhood intervention workforce initiatives which include scholarships and incentives to recruit and retain professionals to work in early childhood intervention.

22 Providing advocacy and advice to improve pre-service training.

Departments will work with universities to ensure that attention is paid to the needs of children and young people with a disability or a developmental delay in pre-service teacher education courses.

23 Strengthening multidisciplinary approaches to working with children and young people with disabilities.

Implementation of reforms to the Student Support Services Program will strengthen multidisciplinary approaches for students with complex needs and support student engagement and learning.

Casestudy

Sharing Our Journey

In 2008, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) introduced a new process to assist children with a severe disability in receipt of a Kindergarten Inclusion Support package to make a positive transition from kindergarten to school. The process includes a protocol for early childhood services and schools, support groups for families and professionals, and an information kit for families.

The *Sharing Our Journey Kit* for families includes a child profile for parents to complete, information sheets for parents, as well as a plan outlining actions to support the child's move from kindergarten to school.

Parents of children with a disability consulted during the development of the family kit were keen to provide information to the school that was not just about assessments or professional reports. Parents wanted the classroom teacher to get to know their child's interests, their child's strengths, tips to help learning, when their child might need assistance and things that may upset the child and how to assist if that occurs.

One parent advised that she 'just wanted the school to understand her child's quirky obsessions...'. Another noted that the protocol would 'help everyone work together and make sure we are all on the same page'.

In 2009, the child profile in the *Sharing Our Journey Kit* was aligned with the *Transition: A Positive Start to School* initiative, recognising the importance of transition planning for all children moving from kindergarten to school, while also acknowledging the benefits of an enhanced transition effort for children with a disability.

5. Co-ordinated services

What we know

We know that children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and their families access a range of mainstream and specialist services. Families are more likely to feel supported and report that services better meet their needs, particularly at times of transition, if services are well co-ordinated and integrated. Joint planning before known transition points is likely to improve the experience of children and young people and their families, and increase the understanding of the workforce about how best to support these transitions.

Unexpected transitions, such as changes in housing and family structures, provide greater challenges for those experiencing them and for the services that support children and young people. However, a more responsive system will identify these issues early in order to respond appropriately and in a timely manner.

What we have done

The Victorian Government has:

- Implemented the *Transition: A Positive Start to School* and *Sharing our Journey* initiative to improve all children's experience of starting school. This initiative provides their families and educators with information about their learning and development in the form of a learning and development statement and enhances the development and delivery of transition to school programs. The *Sharing our Journey kit* initiative assists children with a severe disability to move easily from kindergarten to school and disability services
- Established Early Childhood Intervention Central Intake, a central co-ordinated regional point of entry for services and supports for children from birth to six years of age with a disability or developmental delay, so that families have easy and timely access to early childhood intervention services and supports that will best meet their needs
- Expanded data collections, including the On track data that tracks post-school pathways of young people who have attended special developmental schools
- Developed the *Protocol between Child Protection and Disability Services 2008* to assist Child Protection practitioners and Disability Services staff to strengthen their practice, thereby enhancing the quality of service for children and young people who are supported by both these areas of the Department of Human Services
- Published an updated version of the *Exploring the Possibilities Booklet* as a resource guide to post-school options for young people with a disability (see http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/410698/cis_ffyaexploringpossibilities_pdf_2009.pdf).

What we want to see

The Victorian Government envisions a more cohesive and integrated service system for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and their families. This will be achieved through the development of integrated approaches to assessment, planning and transition, applying across programs and life stages. This cohesive service system will improve the service responses for all children and young people with a disability or developmental delay.

Our directions are towards:

24 Further developing and promoting integrated models of service provision.

In the first instance, this will include the continued implementation of two demonstration projects for child and youth mental health service redesign to deliver more integrated and comprehensive mental health care for children and young people, and the continued implementation and monitoring of the Disability Services/Child Protection protocol.

25 Streamlining access to flexible resources and supports.

Opportunities will be explored to consolidate the various low-cost flexible support packages to reduce the number of contact points within the service system for children, young people and their families. Continuing to progress single entry points in regions for accessing early childhood intervention services is another example of a commitment to this approach.

26 Developing a health and wellbeing service framework for DEECD programs and services working with children and young people from birth to 18 years.

This was a commitment in the Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development (2008), and aims to improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of health and wellbeing services. The programs and services supporting children and young people with a disability or developmental delay will be one focus of this framework.

27 Strengthening regional planning, bringing together early years, education and disability services.

Work between Disability Services and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has started on bringing together early years services, disability services, government and non-government schools to drive reform at the local level and improve co-ordination and planning for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay at critical points of transition.

28 Developing a common assessment framework to reduce the need for duplicate assessments.

This will focus on improving transitions and processes for information sharing so that parents do not have to repeat information. Work on this reform area has begun between Disability Services and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

29 Developing an integrated planning approach to improve the experience of transition.

The *Sharing Our Journey* and *Transition to Employment* initiatives are important first steps to progress this reform. This work will be undertaken in partnership with families.

30 Enhancing existing client data collection systems.

Different data systems used within departments and by funded agencies will be compared to improve consistency of data collection across service systems.

31 Developing an Abilities Index.

The Abilities Index builds on the abilities of each student and ensures that appropriate intervention strategies are developed to meet the individual needs of every student. It will ensure resources are allocated in accordance with students' needs to support better outcomes for students with moderate to severe disabilities and enhance the school's capacity to support all their students. A key focus of the Abilities Index is on determining a student's learning potential, alongside taking the impact of their disability into account. The Abilities Index will be available for implementation in all government schools in 2012.

5 Conclusion

These strategic directions for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay are set out to guide future Victorian Government actions.

By building collaborative partnerships with children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and their families, we are best placed to develop effective, sustainable and high-quality community responses.

The 31 strategic directions locate children, young people and families at the centre of service practice and system design. They strengthen early identification and intervention. They advance social inclusion and participation in the normal experiences and environments of Victorian children and young people. They build professional and service capacity. And they better co-ordinate the range of services that have evolved over years across departments and community sectors.

Some of our partners are already taking important steps in these directions, showing the way. Others are waiting for clearer directions and further action from the Victorian Government.

Through our consultations, it is clear that there is a considerable degree of support for these directions. They are based on the same aspirations the community holds for all Victorian children and young people – that they can grow and develop, safe and healthy, learning with their peers, with their disability understood but not permitted to be a barrier to their wellbeing or their seizing of opportunities.

The directions are also based on a strong awareness of how complex the lives of some families are, and the limited state of our knowledge in some areas. For this reason, the Government intends to pursue these directions in a staged manner, building on our existing strengths, and making sure that supports in early childhood, for school students and for lifelong care, better align with the changing needs of families, children and young people.

These directions provide a long-term map for reform. The Victorian Government is already actively moving in many of these directions. In other directions, first steps are being taken.

The Government is committed to engaging relevant stakeholders, including parents and young people, in the process of implementing these next steps to achieve better opportunities and better outcomes.

Appendix:

Government departments and their responsibilities

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) brings together a range of services for young people from birth to the beginning of adulthood (see www.education.vic.gov.au).

The Department has four main responsibilities:

- 1 Provide policy advice to its Ministers about education, early childhood development and children's services in general
- 2 Implement Victorian government policy on early childhood services
- 3 Implement Victorian government policy on school education (including non-school-based education approaches, such as home schooling) for all school age students
- 4 Manage and drive continuous improvement in the delivery of primary and secondary education in Victorian government schools.

Within these responsibilities, the Department is focused on the provision of services to children. These services are provided both directly and indirectly – directly through government schools; and indirectly through regulation or funding of early childhood services and non-government school education.

Department of Health

The Victorian Department of Health's objective is to enhance and protect the health and wellbeing of all Victorians (see www.health.vic.gov.au).

The Department works with the community to provide better access to health, aged care and mental health and drug services. It does this through managing the public hospital system, developing health infrastructure in rural and metropolitan Victoria, pursuing opportunities for partnership with the primary care sector and other governments, public health interventions, and implementing major health initiatives such as the Victorian Cancer Action Plan. It also encourages Victorians to improve their health through preventative health initiatives and education programs.

The Department of Health is committed to building a healthier Victoria and investing in the health of Victorians. It works towards these goals by growing its dedicated healthcare workforce and working with key partners, including health services, local government authorities and other state government departments to address emerging health issues across the state.

Department of Human Services

The Department of Human Services (DHS) is committed to enhancing and protecting the wellbeing of all Victorians, emphasising vulnerable groups and those most in need (see www.dhs.vic.gov.au). The Department plans, funds and delivers community and housing services in line with the Government's vision for making Victoria a stronger, more caring and innovative state. The DHS portfolio comprises disability, children, and housing.

Disability Services provide support for Victorians with intellectual, physical, sensory and dual disabilities, neurological impairments and acquired brain injury.

The Children, Youth and Families Division focuses on the health, safety, development, learning and wellbeing of children, young people and families in Victoria. The division plays a key role in the planning and provision of services to Victorian children and their

families. It covers Victoria's statutory responsibilities, such as child protection and youth justice.

The Housing and Community Building Division provides housing and support to Victorians most in need. This includes homelessness and crisis support, affordable rental housing and training and employment opportunities for people in public housing.

Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development

The Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (DIIRD) is the Victorian Government's lead agency for economic and regional development, and is instrumental in building an innovative state (see www.diird.vic.gov.au). The Department's formation reflects the Government's increasing emphasis on innovation as a key driver of future economic success.

DIIRD is responsible for economic development in Victoria. Offices across the state and in key cities overseas act as a liaison between industries and the Victorian Government, and it is often the first point of contact between the two.

In its role as key liaison between industry and the state, the Department ensures that innovative practices and technologies are championed across industries and businesses; that industries have access to a range of programs, assistance and advice to foster growth and development; and that infrastructure projects in regional areas are supported and developed.

Department of Planning and Community Development

The Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) was established in August 2007 to lead and support the development of liveable communities (see www.dvc.vic.gov.au).

The Victorian Government is committed to delivering improvements in urban planning and development, particularly in the outer suburbs and regional areas where strong growth is expected. DPCD is placing the needs of these growing communities front and centre. This ensures we are building strong communities that are well planned, well designed and which help Victoria continue to be one of the world's most liveable states.

DPCD is placing people at the heart of Victorian Government efforts to plan for liveability and growth, by focusing on two things crucial to Victoria's future: the liveability of our neighbourhoods and the strength of our communities.

Department of Premier and Cabinet

The Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) assists the Government in creating sustainable growth and a vibrant, innovative society by leading policy advice and implementing key projects and activities (see www.dpc.vic.gov.au).

The Department and its secretary are responsible to the Premier, who is also Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Veteran's Affairs. It advises the Premier on matters affecting the Government as a whole and on issues specific to his portfolio. The Department also provides advice to the Minister for the Arts and the Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change.

DPC has a leadership role in the identification and implementation of the strategic directions of Government. It achieves this through the provision of independent, rigorous and soundly based policy advice to Cabinet committees. It also manages relationships with other governments in Australia and overseas and develops processes for community engagement.

DPC supports the Premier by:

- providing strategic, rigorous and innovative policy advice
- developing and leading whole-of-government initiatives that aim to ensure effective outcomes for all Victorians
- delivering services to enhance the contribution of creative industries within the Victorian community, and
- promoting community engagement in government decision-making through regular Community Cabinet meetings and other means.

Department of Treasury and Finance

The Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) provides the Government with economic, financial and resource management policy advice to assist it in delivering its policy outcomes (see www.dtf.vic.gov.au). DTF's innovative, expert advice balances economic, social and environmental goals within a framework of responsible financial management.

This includes:

- supporting the Government in budget and financial management
- delivering innovative and timely policy advice, influencing the Government's decisions on a range of economic, social and environmental issues
- providing strategic leadership across the public sector on economic and financial sector reform
- assisting the Government with the implementation of major infrastructure projects and frameworks
- influencing decisions made by the Government on major contractual arrangements across the state.

