



Creating inclusive early childhood education and care services



Photo: Vicki Yen

The right to participate

The rights of children with disability to access and participate in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services are set out in national and state-based legislation such as the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and Disability Standards for Education 2005 and the Queensland *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991*. These rights are also set out in international covenants, such as the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability*. (For detailed information on legislation that supports inclusion, see Information Sheets 3–7 in this series.)

The principles of inclusive service delivery and practice are also embedded in the *National Quality Framework* (NQF), the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) and the *My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia* (FSAC).

These legislative requirements and frameworks seek to promote access and participation of children with disability in ECEC services. However, research shows that many children with disability continue to face barriers to inclusion.

Who needs inclusion?

Each child's needs are unique. Children with disability and complex additional needs achieve meaningful participation in ECEC services when their needs are met through thoughtful planning and programs. This is not a 'marginal' issue for our communities. Seven per cent of Australia's children and youth (aged birth to 14 years)—or more than a quarter of a million children—have a diagnosed disability (AIHW, 2013, pp. 12, 202). If we look more broadly and include children with undiagnosed conditions, then almost 20 per cent of children in their first year of school have additional health and developmental needs (AEDC, 2015).

Why is inclusion important?

The research into inclusion in ECEC is consistent and compelling: participation in high-quality ECEC programs can boost children's wellbeing and their learning outcomes, with effects that last throughout their lives. The effects are most positive for children facing 'multiple disadvantage' in their early lives (Sylva et al, 2014, p. 25). The fact is, children with complex additional needs benefit **the most** from participation in ECEC—but these same children are **least likely** to attend ECEC services (Productivity Commission, 2014, p. 9).

We also know that children with disability are less likely to access early childhood education in the year before full-time school than other children. In 2013, around 15 per cent of children with disability were not accessing early childhood education in the year prior to school, compared to only 10 per cent of children without disability (Baxter & Hand, 2013, p. 36).

Poor rates of inclusion affect many children, not only those with disability. Young children from remote communities, socio-economically disadvantaged

backgrounds, Indigenous cultures and non-English speaking backgrounds also face barriers to participating in ECEC services (Baxter & Hand, 2013, p. 16). If this is the challenge, then what can ECEC services do to create genuinely inclusive environments and programs—for all children in their communities?



Photo: Lime

Building greater inclusion

The NQF, EYLF and FSAC require the leaders of ECEC services—including approved providers, service supervisors and management, and educators—to build inclusion for all children, including those with disability.

Under the National Quality Standard (NQS) ECEC services are required to:

- support each child's health needs (Element 2.1.1)
- provide an environment that is inclusive (Standard 3.2)
- facilitate access to inclusion and support assistance (Element 6.3.3) (ACECQA, 2013).

When services are more inclusive, they can contribute to the life experiences and development of children with disability. The inclusion of children with disability also creates a richer and more authentic social experience for children without disability.

Strategies for inclusion

The task of building inclusion is a team effort. It involves approved providers, service supervisors and management, and educators working with families and allied health professionals to help children participate in meaningful ways.

Finding the right advice and support is important. Under the [Disability Inclusion Support for Queensland Kindergartens \(DISQK\)](#) program, kindergartens in Queensland can access funding to help support the inclusion of children with diagnosed or suspected disability.

The Early Years Connect (EYC) program also includes detailed advice and strategies for creating inclusive ECEC environments for children with disability and complex additional needs. Visit the [Early Childhood Education and Care](#) website to access online learning modules, webinars on inclusion, and information sheets designed to meet the needs of approved providers, service supervisors and management, and educators.



Photo: Vicki Yen

Where to find more information

The Queensland Government publishes online information and links for early childhood services and parents on [learning support](#) and [early intervention](#) for children with disability and complex additional needs.



References

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