

Department of Treasury & Finance

**Investing in Victorian Children
with a Disability and their Families**

**State Budget Submission
November 2011**



Association for Children with a Disability

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About the Association for Children with a Disability

Established 31 years ago, the Association for Children with a Disability (ACD) is a non-profit community based organisation representing children with a disability and their families living in Victoria. ACD currently holds a membership of just over 2,000.

Our Statement of Purpose

- To empower parents of children with a disability to be as self-sufficient as possible in advocating on behalf of their child and family.
- To promote and advance the rights of children with a disability and their families.
- To advocate on behalf of children with a disability and their families to ensure the best possible support and services are available.
- To work collaboratively with other organisations to improve the service system for children with a disability and their families.

Our Guiding Principles

- To be responsive to the needs of children with a disability and their families.
- To provide a professional, quality service.
- To be proactive by raising issues with government and building awareness in the community about the rights of children with a disability and their families.

Introduction

We all know that the best measure of a society is how well it supports its most vulnerable. The Victorian Families Statement released by Premier Baillieu recognises that over the years some people have been left behind and that your Government "wants to give people a helping hand when they need it."¹ To do this successfully, people's circumstances and the challenges they face need to be understood so that Government responses are appropriately targeted and justifiable.

The global events that impact on our economy are well documented, as is the resilience Victoria has in weathering the current climate of uncertainty. This creates challenges for those who hold the mandate to govern responsibly. Victorians expect your Government to manage our State with a steady hand and to take into account what is best for all Victorians. In doing so, the Victorian Families Statement provides a solid foundation for the decisions required to be made in the upcoming Budget for 2012-13.

Through our day-to-day contact with families working to support their children with a disability, we have a very clear understanding of issues these citizens of Victoria are grappling with and the challenges they face in trying to achieve the best outcomes for their child and family.

Young families have specific factors impacting on their caring capacities. Many are busy raising more than one child and the combined demands on them to support their whole family should not be underestimated. They are starting out, at the beginning of their journey as a family, establishing careers, often in the early stages of paying off a mortgage, working to sustain and enrich the relationship with their partner whilst nurturing and educating their children who are emotionally and financially dependent on them ... a juggle at the best of times!

¹ Victorian Government, 2011 Victorian Families Statement,
<http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/announcements/victorian-families-statement.html>

Our appreciation of the pressures on children with a disability and their families is supported by documented evidence, often with alarming consistency:

- The Victorian Auditor General's investigation into Individualised Funding for Disability Services
- The Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Supported Accommodation for Victorians with a Disability and/or Mental Illness
- The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development ECIS Reform
- The Victorian Auditor General's investigation into the Program for Students with Disabilities
- Standing Committee for Family, Community, Housing and Youth - Better Care of our Carers Report
- Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs – Shut Out Report – experiences of people with disabilities and their families in Australia
- The Productivity Commission's Final Report on Disability, Care and Support

It is ACD's view that the following three key priority areas require urgent responses by the State Government and on behalf of all Victorian children with a disability and their families, we recommend their inclusion in the 2012-13 State Budget.

Investing early in children with a disability

"Nothing is more important for the future prosperity of families than a good education, starting in early childhood."

2011 Victorian Families Statement

2,000 additional places in Early Childhood Intervention Services
1,000 additional Kindergarten Inclusion Support Packages

Early Childhood Intervention Services

*"Without the strategies implemented by his early intervention team, to communicate effectively, manage his behaviour and learn to play with the other children, it would have been difficult for my son to successfully transition to a mainstream setting."
(Parent)*

Identifying children's support needs early is vital if they are to thrive and opportunities to do so should not be jeopardised. "It is well recognised that a healthy start to life is critical in maximising each child's educational potential, and their eventual contribution to and participation in the community."²

Families need emotional support, information about their child's condition, practical support to make adaptations and to help establish sustainable daily routines.³

² First Voice, July 2011, A social cost-benefit analysis, Early intervention programs to assist children with hearing loss develop spoken language, <http://firstvoice.org.au/>

³ Department of Education & Early Childhood (DEECD), December 2010, *Early Childhood Intervention Reform Project*, <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/earlychildhood/intervention/ecislitrevexsumdec2010.pdf>

Kindergarten Inclusion Support Scheme

"The main reason why my son's inclusion worked so well is because of the additional assistant in the kindergarten." (Parent)

Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services (KISS) is promoted as, "an inclusive program that fosters the development of a sense of belonging and respects individuality and diversity, in order to promote learning, development and well-being in a child's early years".⁴

Too many children who need support to have a successful kindergarten experience are missing out and entering primary school at a distinct disadvantage. "While 2.6% of Victorian children are recognised as needing early childhood intervention services, only 1% of the kindergarten population get direct support through the Kindergarten Inclusion Support Service."⁵

Investing in educating children with a disability

"We need to give our kids the best possible environment to learn in."

2011 Victorian Families Statement

**Increase access to The Student Support Service Program
Better support for student transport to special education settings**

Student Support Services Program

"A parent rang to see how she could increase the speech therapy her son was receiving because one hour a term was not enough." (Parent Support Worker)

In Victoria, around 20% of people aged over 15 years with a disability have not progressed beyond Year 8, compared to 5% of the general population.⁶

For the Student Support Service Program to achieve its objectives of assisting children and young people to achieve their education and developmental potential, it needs to be better supported.

Program staff require the time to work effectively with students so that their intervention is more beneficial.

⁴ Department of Education & Early Childhood (DEECD), July 2011, *Information and application kit for kindergarten inclusion support services for children with severe disabilities 2012*, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/ecsmangement/careankinder/inclusion/disabilities.htm>

⁵ Early Childhood Intervention Australia (Victorian Chapter), October 2011, *Our Children Can't Wait, State Budget Submission 2012/2013*, http://www.eciavic.org.au/resources/ECIA%20Budget%20Doc%20OCT%202011_web.pdf

⁶ Department of Education & Early Childhood (DEECD), June 2009, *The state of Victoria's children 2008: A report on how children and young people in Victoria are faring*, <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/govrel/Policy/children/sovcreport08.pdf>

Student transport to special education settings

"It takes my son one-and-a-half hours on the bus to get to his special school. I have to wake my medically fragile child at 6.30am so he can be tube fed, have other medications and treatments before the bus arrives at 7.30am." (Parent)

Buses need to be staffed by appropriately trained personnel to ensure that children with a disability are safe during bus trips and that their individual needs are met. Lengthy trips to and from school are unacceptable and bordering on inhumane. On top of a full day at school, children should not be sitting for extended periods of time with no room to move or option for a toilet stop. Contracts covering transport operators must include shorter trips and relevant OH&S qualifications for chaperones.

Investing in disability support for children with a disability

"Far too many families are made to wait for shared supported accommodation, day programs and support to live in the community. This can place even more pressure on carers and families of people with a disability."

2011 Victorian Families Statement

Reduction in the number of children on the Disability Support Register (DSR): 50% in 2012-13 and 100% by 2013-14

Disability Support Register

"A mother called and said that despite applying for an Individual Support Package, there was no indication of when or how much support would be provided." (Parent)

The primary pathway to getting help with caring for a child with a disability is via the Disability Support Register (DSR). Demand for support significantly outweighs current government investment in the provision of Individual Support Packages.

At the end of 2010 there were 3,023 people registered as requiring significant help. From the requests for help we receive, it is obvious families cannot get support when they need it, even in crisis situations.

Our experience is validated by the Victorian Auditor General who stated that, "in March 2011 funds allocated to Individual Support Packages fell \$15.6 million short and people are waiting an average of 1.45 years to receive funding".⁷

⁷ Victorian Auditor-General's Office, September 2011, *Victorian Auditor-General's Report: Individualised Funding for Disability Services*, <http://www.audit.vic.gov.au/publications/20110914-Disability-Funding/20110914-Disability-Funding.pdf>

Investing in new growth areas

*"Victorians deserve to have access to services and opportunities wherever they live."
2011 Victorian Families Statement*

Young families are drawn to the growth corridors exploding on Melbourne's urban fringe and in regional Victoria. Housing is more affordable but the infrastructure to support young families who have a child with a disability is clearly missing. Supporting local authorities to plan for strong and vibrant local communities must include consideration of accessible infrastructure and the availability of disability related services and supports.

Conclusion

At ACD we have seen a marked increase in the number of emergency calls for help and the lack of positive service system responses to their genuine and overwhelming needs in early childhood, education and disability support.

It is no exaggeration to state that as a result of the lack of adequate support, family relationships are breaking down and children are being relinquished into care at an alarming rate, with indisputable long-term damage to their wellbeing.

Waiting for federal government responses and the roll-out of a National Disability Insurance Scheme to solve these problems is not a viable option for families.

Elizabeth McGarry

Chief Executive Officer