

Through the Maze

*A Guide to Benefits and Services
for Families of Children with a Disability
(3rd reprint of the 5th edition – February 2003)*



Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the State Government's Department of Human Services (Disability Services Division) who provided a significant contribution towards the cost of this booklet.

Languages other than English

A summary version of *Through the Maze* is also available in various community languages. Contact the Association for details. If you require a language interpreter, phone 13 1450.

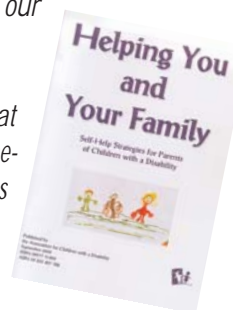
Keeping up-to-date

One of the best ways to keep up-to-date with new programs and services is to become a member of our Association and read our bi-monthly magazine, 'NoticeBoard'. Membership costs only \$5 or \$10 per year for families and \$25 for organisations.

See the application form on the back cover of this booklet or contact our office on (03) 9500 1232 or 1800 654 013.



'NoticeBoard' includes parent stories, real life accounts about what life is like for families of children with a disability. They are a timely reminder that you are not alone and share similar experiences with many other families.



*We also distribute the free booklet
'Helping You and Your Family:*

Self-help Strategies for Parents of Children with a Disability'.

Most of our members are parents of children with a disability, but family and friends, students, professionals and service providers are also welcome to join and enjoy the benefits of receiving 'NoticeBoard'.

Association for Children with a Disability

We are a parent support organisation providing information, support and advocacy to all parents who have a child with any type of disability. We are a non-profit organisation run by parents of children with a disability. Our Parent Support Workers and our Committee of Management are parents of children with a disability.

We work in close co-operation with a network of Regional Parent Support Co-ordinators in Victoria and various statewide and national parent support groups. For parents/carers we provide free telephone information and advice about any issues relating to children with a disability including education, respite, aids and equipment, home care and recreation. Our contact details are:

Association for Children with a Disability

590 Orrong Road, Armadale, Vic 3143

Phone: (03) 9500 1232 • Fax: (03) 9500 1240 • Freecall: 1800 654 013

Email: mail@acd.org.au • Internet: www.acd.org.au

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Cover picture by Justin McCarthy



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Warning!

This booklet is very detailed and can be a bit daunting for first-time readers. It is not designed to be read cover to cover in one sitting. It is meant as a resource booklet for you to keep and refer to when you need it. Also, make sure you have a copy of your Key Regional Contacts information sheet  to keep with this booklet. See more on page ii.



Key Starting Points

This page is designed to be read in conjunction with the Contents page. It should help direct you to the most relevant pages of *Through the Maze* for you and your family.

<i>Children aged 0 - 5 years</i>	<i>Turning 6 and into the school years</i>	<i>Towards Adulthood</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playgroups (page 5) • Specialist Children's Services and Early Childhood Intervention Services (page 5) • Early Choices (page 5) • Child care, including Children's Services Resource and Development Officers (page 6) • Preschool, including Preschool Field Officers (page 6) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability Client Services, Intake, Access and Response Teams (pages 2 & 29) • Schools, education and the Program for Students with Disabilities and Impairments (pages 7 & 8) • Making A Difference (page 9) • Recreation (page 19) • Service Needs Register (page 21) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turning 16 and Centrelink (page 23) • Futures for Young Adults (page 23) • Service Needs Register (page 21) • Accommodation (page 22) • Teenagers and Towards Adulthood (page 23)

In addition to services for children of a specific age, there are other key services for children across all age groups.

Services available across all age groups:

- Regional Parent Support Co-ordinators and other information/advocacy services (pages 2 & 30)
- Home and Community Care (HACC) via your Local Council (pages 13 & 14)
- Respite - Regional Carer Respite Centres (page 13)
- Accessibility to buildings, events, transport etc., Education (page 8); Recreation (page 19); Transport (page 20); Legal Issues (page 24)
- Centrelink (pages 11 & 12)
- Siblings (page 25)

In addition to services specifically designed for families of children with a disability, *Through the Maze* also includes a range of community services and activities available to all families, including playgroups (page 5); parks and playgrounds (page 19); community health (page 14); financial counselling (page 26) and neighbourhood houses (page 26).



Introduction

As parents of children with a disability, we share many emotions and experiences. Our commitment at the Association for Children with a Disability is to help you identify and access the help and support you think is appropriate for your child and family.

The service system for families of children with a disability in Victoria is complicated. We have written this booklet to help you and your family negotiate 'through the maze' to find the services your children need. While it won't answer every question, it should at least point you in the right direction. Further information and support is only a phone call away. If you have any questions about this booklet, or any other issues you need help with, contact our Parent Support Workers on (03) 9500 1232 or 1800 654 013 or mail@acd.org.au or see www.acd.org.au.

Taking the first step


It is often difficult to take the first step and ask for help. Please remember, by creating services to assist families of children with a disability, society has acknowledged that families like yours have 'special needs' and deserve access to appropriate support services.

How to use Through the Maze

In addition to the Contents page, a table of Key Starting Points (see opposite) will help direct you to the pages of interest to you and your family. If you can't find what you want quickly, contact us and we'll talk you through it.

Key Regional Contacts information sheets

The specific services that are available to you, will often depend on where you live. Your suburb or town is located in one of Victoria's 79 Local Government Areas (LGAs) and one of nine Department of Human Services (DHS) Regions. Many services are based on LGA or regional boundaries. See page 28 for a list of LGAs and regions.

We also publish Key Regional Contacts (KRC) information sheets with contact details for key services in each DHS region. These sheets are an essential companion to this booklet. They are available on our Internet site www.acd.org.au or contact us for copies. Note: Throughout this booklet the symbol  is used to indicate that specific contact details are included in our Key Regional Contacts information sheets.

Waiting lists & service quality

Each service has its own eligibility criteria and it is possible that the demand for a service might mean that you encounter a waiting list. In negotiating access to a service, never understate your situation. Services make decisions based on the information you give them. Tell it like it is! Sometimes you might find the quality of a service is not of an acceptable standard. Never accept a low quality service. Take up the issues directly with the service. If you need further assistance, contact our Parent Support Workers or your Regional Parent Support Co-ordinator (see pages 2 and 30).

Your feedback

We welcome your comments and feedback. Please let us know your ideas for improving *Through the Maze* or other parts of our service.



Your Parent Support Network

"The time after we found out (our child's diagnosis) was just terrible. It was like the deepest fog you could imagine. I didn't know which way was up. We were getting advice from all over the place, but none of it seemed to make any sense. Thinking back now, we just weren't ready to take it all in. It takes time... Gradually, bit by bit, over the next year life became a little easier. We became more confident to seek out information, to ask questions about services and support that might be available. Meeting up with other parents was fantastic - people who really understand!"

Information, support, advocacy:

- *having, or knowing how to access regular, current, accurate information;*
- *opportunities to meet and talk to other parents for mutual support; and*
- *belonging to groups whose advocacy for families helps improve your situation and the service system.*

When you combine the three you have started a powerful information and support network.

Information

In addition to Parent Support Workers at the Association for Children with a Disability and our bi-monthly magazine, 'NoticeBoard', one of the key links for information sharing is your Regional Parent Support Co-ordinator (see pages 2 and 30). They have regular newsletters, offer workshops, parent/carer camps and a wide variety of opportunities to broaden your network of support. They are available to speak to you on the phone and can put you in touch with other parents in your local area.

There might also be opportunities to use new technology (eg. Internet chat facilities) or creative use of old technology (eg. telephone conferences involving three or more parents).

Other important sources of information are disability-specific support groups, which, depending on the disability, may include statewide, national or international groups. These groups offer a range of information and support that relates to a particular disability.

Support

All parents need support from one another. It's a basic need that can be overlooked when you have a child with a disability because there are so many other issues to deal with. Parent support can be as simple as stopping for a chat in the car park or on the street before a meeting or going to another parent's house for coffee.

The exchange of information, listening and personal experience you share with your friends is the most basic and essential parent support. Often, talking with another parent who has gone through what you are about to, will assist you to be better prepared and informed in your own decision making. Information sharing can give you the confidence to be assertive in seeking what you need for you and your family.

Advocacy

Another aspect of the work of our Association and other parent support groups is to lobby for positive change to the framework of support services for families of children with a disability.

As parents, we are continually advocating for our child and family. Connections with others (individuals, local groups or statewide organisations) provides you with the opportunity to be a more effective advocate for yourself and your family. You'll also be helping the next generation of families.

Taking the Next Step


While feelings of isolation can at times be overwhelming, it is important to remember that there are so many ways to connect with others who will listen, understand, and who provide information and advice. Taking the next step may be difficult, but it is possible and it can be as simple as using your phone, your Internet connection or stopping to talk to another parent.



Information & Support

The starting point for further information and support may depend on where you live, your child's age and if your child has an established diagnosis.


Regional Parent Support Co-ordinators *(see page 30 for contact details)*

Regional Parent Support Co-ordinators are based in local/regional areas and provide information about services and opportunities to make contact with other parents of children with a disability. They also provide workshops and forums on a range of topics. For more information, including contact details for your nearest Regional Parent Support Co-ordinator see page 30 or contact the Association office. 

Early Childhood Intervention & Specialist Children's Services

Early Childhood Intervention (ECI), Specialist Children's Services (SCS) and Specialist Child and Family Services (SCAFS), are program names for a group of services which promote the health, well-being and developmental needs of children aged 0-5 (birth to school entry) who have a developmental delay/disability. These services also provide social and emotional support for families, including opportunities to meet other parents. See page 5 for more details.

Disability Client Services Intake & Response Service

Each regional office of the Department of Human Services (DHS) has a Disability Intake and Response service dedicated to providing information and referral advice for all families of children with a disability aged 6 or over. Families should contact their regional team on 1800 783 783 to explore service options. 

Statewide or National Parent Support Organisations, Self-Help & Advocacy Groups

Examples of statewide/national parent support groups include: Action on Disability in Ethnic Communities 9383 5566; Autistic Family Support Association (via Autism Victoria 9885 0533); ADDVic 1800 233 842 and Active (ADHD) 9650 2570; Asperger Syndrome Support Network 9885 3760; Defence Special Needs Support Group 1800 020 031; Genetic Support Network of Victoria 8341 6315; Cerebral Palsy Support Network 9348 2677; the Chronic Illness Alliance 9479 3218; the Cystic Fibrosis Association 9686 1811; the Down Syndrome Association of Victoria 9486 2377; Gastrostomy Information and Support Service 1800 888 824; Headway (ABI) 9642 2411; Brain Foundation Victoria 9882 2203 or 1800 677 579; STAR (Intellectual disability) 9650 2730; Victorian Council of Deaf People 9650 6786 (TTY via the National Relay Service 13 3677); Muscular Dystrophy Association 9370 0477. Aged over 18: VALID 9416 4003, Disability Rights Victoria 9489 2999 and the Carers Association 9650 9966 or 1800 242 636. Also see Advocacy on page 25 and 'Disability Services and Support Organisations' in the Yellow Pages.


Statewide Service Providers

Examples of statewide non-government disability services include: Australian Quadriplegic Association of Victoria 9489 0777; SCOPE Victoria (formerly Spastic Society) 9537 2611; SPEECH 9432 5188; SPELD (for learning difficulties) 9489 4344; Statewide Autistic Services 9773 6044; Victorian Deaf Society 9657 8111 (voice), 9657 8130 (TTY); VSDC Services for Deaf Children 9510 9961 (voice), 9510 7143 (TTY); Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind 9522 5222; Vision Australia Foundation 9864 9222; Yooralla 9650 4077. For more listings see 'Disability Services and Support Organisations' in the Yellow Pages.

Rural Access

See page 25 for the Rural Access - Building Inclusive Rural Communities program.

Local Council

Most local councils produce information directories with contacts for local services. If you don't have a current local council Community Directory, ring your council and ask them to send you one. Also ask for information on all services they provide to assist families of children with a disability, including Home and Community Care (HACC). Also see pages 13 and 14. 

Internet Information

www.acd.org.au	Association for Children with a Disability
www.disability.vic.gov.au	Disability Online
www.dhs.vic.gov.au/disability	Disability Services Division of the Dept. of Human Services
www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/disabil	Department of Education and Training (DET)
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au	Better Health Channel
www.infoexchange.net.au	The Info-X-Change



Doctors & Paediatricians

A good local doctor, (also known as general practitioner or GP) should be a reliable source of information and support for you and your family. Hopefully, you already have a local GP you feel comfortable with and who respects and understands you and your family.

In addition to your local GP, it is likely that you will also need to consult with various 'specialist' doctors at different times in your child's life. As with your local GP, it is important to try and establish good communication with specialist doctors. You should be able to talk freely about your child's condition and needs, about your needs and feelings and the situation of the family as a whole. The doctor or specialist should be able to explain things in detail and in words you can understand.

Many families who have a child with a developmental delay/disability find it helpful to have a regular general paediatrician. Paediatricians are doctors who specialise in caring for children. They understand about the nature, severity, long-term outlook and causes of disabilities in children and can offer advice about local services. They can also look out for associated conditions and manage any complications that may occur. Access to paediatricians is via a referral from your local GP.

Paediatricians are involved in two key hospital-based services offering free assessment and advice for families of children with any type of disability/developmental delay:

- Department of Child Development and Rehabilitation at the Royal Children's Hospital 9345 5898
- Developmental Disabilities Clinic of Monash Medical Centre 9594 2399

Another source of medical advice on disability issues is the Centre for Developmental Disability Health Victoria 9564 7511. The Centre provides a disability advice and education service to GPs and other medical practitioners, not to families directly.

Another booklet published by our Association, 'Helping You and Your Family: Self-Help Strategies for Parents of Children with a Disability' also includes a section about working with doctors and medical specialists.



Hospitals & Emergency Numbers

In this booklet, we don't have space to describe in detail all the different services and clinics available at hospitals throughout Victoria. Your access to hospital services and clinics will usually occur via referral from your local doctor or paediatrician. Ideally, any involvement you have with hospitals will include clear communication and co-operation between hospital staff, your local doctor and paediatrician/specialist, and other services involved in assisting your family.

In addition to doctors and nurses, most hospitals have social workers or other staff available to assist families of children with a disability. These staff may have titles such as Patient Liaison Officer, Patient Advisor, Disabilities Liaison Officer, Disabilities Nurse or Complaints Officer. In your contact with hospitals, if there is any issue you need help with, don't be afraid to ask hospital staff for assistance.

- Ambulance, Police, Fire 000
- Ambulance, Police, Fire (TTY) 106
- Poisons Information Centre 13 1126
- Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) Switchboard 9345 5522
 - RCH Disabilities Nurse 9345 5692
 - RCH Social Work Department 9345 6111
 - RCH Customer Liaison and Complaints Officer pager no. 4053
- Monash Medical Centre Switchboard 9594 6666
 - Monash Patient Advisor 9594 2745
 - Monash Social Work Department 9594 2290
- For all health services, including rural hospitals, search the Better Health Channel www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au or see the Emergency Health and Help Section at the beginning of the White Pages.



Therapy

Therapy includes physiotherapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, orientation and mobility, orthotics and podiatry, rehabilitation after surgery and other various therapies. Access to therapy services is not straightforward. Decisions need to be made about the type of therapy and then it is a case of researching the options. Paediatricians/doctors should be helpful in discussing therapy options. For many families, the cost of therapy is a major issue and the potential benefits of private health insurance need to be carefully considered. Also see *Home/Personal Care and Support* (page 14).

Early Childhood Intervention Services/Specialist Children's Services Early Childhood Intervention and Specialist Children's Services are a group of services that promote the health, well-being and developmental needs of children with a developmental delay/disability from birth to school entry. They provide specialist teaching and therapy along with other support for families. Also see page 5.

Schools For children of school age, therapy needs should be discussed with the school as part of general planning (see page 8). Therapy may be part of the assistance provided by schools.

Community Agencies Disability Client Services of the Department of Human Services fund various community agencies to provide therapy support, including Yooralla 9650 4077; SCOPE Victoria 9537 2611; Vision Australia 9864 9222; Victorian Deaf Society 9657 8111; Villa Maria 9853 5377; Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind 9522 5222 and the Deaf-Blind Care Association 9482 1155.

Community Health Centres Therapy available through Community Health Centres varies from one centre to another. All families of children with a disability should make contact with their local centre and explore the availability and cost of therapy offered. For your nearest centre, ask your doctor or Maternal and Child Health Nurse, or check 'Community Health Centres' in the Yellow Pages.

Hospitals For families having regular contact with a hospital, therapy might be available as part of the hospital's assessment and treatment. Also see page 3.

Surgery & Rehabilitation Following surgery or a stay in hospital, your child and family might be eligible for assistance through 'post-acute care' programs. Discuss these options with your doctor. If post-operative therapy/rehabilitation is not available as part of the hospital's service, other options include Community Health Centres, private services or temporary arrangements to services provided through Early Childhood Intervention, Schools or Case Management/Care Packages (page 9).

Types of Therapy For information on types of therapy relevant to particular disabilities eg. Conductive Education for children with Cerebral Palsy, contact the relevant disability specific parent support group or statewide service provider (page 2). The range of therapies available to children with a disability include some that are referred to as 'alternative' or 'complementary'. Examples include Bowan Therapy, Art and Music therapy, Doman Delacato, Homeopathy, Metabolic Therapy, Cranial Osteopathy, Naturopathy, Neurological Splinting, Point Percussion Therapy and Votja Therapy. For more details contact the Association office.

Private Therapy Services A wide range of options exist for families in a position to pay for therapy. Discuss details with your paediatrician/doctor. Check the Yellow Pages for 'Occupational Therapists', 'Podiatrists', 'Physiotherapists' and 'Speech Pathologists'.

Behavioural Difficulties For children over 6, options for assistance with behavioural difficulties include the Family Intervention Support Service (FISS) or Behavioural Intervention Support Team (BIST) through Disability Client Services of the Department of Human Services (see page 9). For children with severe behavioural difficulties under 6 or with no established diagnosis, contact Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (page 17).

Aids, Equipment & Communication For aids/equipment and advice on therapy associated with severe communication impairment, see pages 15 and 16.



Early Childhood Intervention

Early Childhood Intervention, Specialist Children's Services and Specialist Child and Family Services are program names for services which promote the health, well-being and developmental needs of children aged 0-5 (birth to school entry) who have a developmental delay/disability. They also provide other support services for families, including opportunities to meet other parents and ongoing parent support groups.

The style of service offered through the early intervention system varies from region to region. Some services are centre-based where the child and/or parents attend a program based at an organisation. Some services involve home visits, where a professional visits families at home to provide support and advice. Many services include children with a wide range of different disabilities. Some services specialise in particular disabilities eg. Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Vision Impairment, Hearing Impairment, Down Syndrome. Early intervention services typically involve a mixture of specialist teaching, therapy and other support programs for the child, and information and support for parents.

The first step is to obtain a list of all services in your region (and any other relevant specialist services you can access in other regions). Ring your regional office of the Department of Human Services (see page 29) and ask for Specialist Children's Services. They can send you a list and other information. They can also help discuss the options with you. Note: In some areas there is an official 'intake' system which involves making an appointment to discuss your early intervention service options.

After reading about the services available, you will probably be able to narrow your search to two or three services. Contact them to request more information and ask detailed questions. Arrange to visit the service. It should be up to the service to demonstrate to you that they can provide what you are looking for. Sometimes there are waiting lists and your first choice of service may not be immediately available. For more information contact Early Childhood Intervention Australia (Vic Chapter) on 9345 7903.

Playgroups, Parent Support & Child Care

Your early childhood intervention service should be able to provide you with information about playgroups (page 6), parent support groups (pages 1 and 2) and other relevant services, such as child care (page 6), respite (page 13) and case management/care packages (page 9).

Education, Therapy & Family Support

In addition to the provision of educational programs, therapy and other support for the child, early intervention services are designed to provide information and support to parents and families. Services should assist you to meet with other parents and develop your own independent networks for information and ongoing support. The benefits include learning from other parents' experiences, getting up-to-date information about new services and being more confident about ways to find the best services and support for you and your family.

Maternal & Child Health Services

Locally based Maternal and Child Health Nurses provide information and advice about general health and development of children from birth to school age. Even after you have been referred to an early childhood intervention service, Maternal and Child Health Nurses can be a valuable additional source of information and support. Contact your local council for details.

Early Choices

For families of children aged 0-5 (from birth to school entry) with high support needs, a program called Early Choices provides additional help with locating, organising and paying for services (see page 9). For children with high medical needs see the Family Choice Program (page 9).

Respite

Contact your Regional Carer Respite Centre (page 13) or your local council (page 2).

Preschool

Early childhood intervention services work in partnership with local preschools to attempt to ensure that every child has the opportunity for a full year of preschool (see page 6).

Leaving Early Intervention, Turning 6 & going to school

When your child turns 6 or goes to school, the service system changes. It is very important to work with your early intervention service to plan your child and family's transition. See pages 7 and 8 for details about education. For information about other services contact the Disability Intake, Access and Response Team at your regional office of the Department of Human Services (see pages 2 and 29). Also consider the Making a Difference program (page 9).

Best Start

Best Start is a State Government strategy to improve the health, development and well-being of all Victorian children from before birth through transition to school. See www.beststart.vic.gov.au.



Child Care & Preschool

In addition to services for children aged 0-5 years, child care also includes vacation care and other outside school hours care for older children. For child care for older children, contact your CSRDO (see below) and also see Respite (page 13), Recreation (page 19) and Teenagers and Towards Adulthood (page 23).

Playgroups

A playgroup is a group of young children with their parents/carers who regularly meet to have fun playing and socialising. Some playgroups involve children who all have a disability, while others involve a mix of children with and without disabilities. For details of playgroups in your local area contact the Inclusion Officer at Playgrouping Victoria on 1800 811 156.


Child Care Access Hotline

1800 670 305

The Child Care Access Hotline 1800 670 305 provides up-to-date information and contact details for child care services in all local areas throughout Australia, including help with the cost of care and information about programs to assist access to child care for children with a disability, such as the Special Needs Subsidy Scheme (SNSS).

CSRDOs

Children's Services Resource & Development Officers

Children's Services Resource and Development Officers promote inclusion of children with 'additional needs' into child care services. CSRDOs work with all forms of child care, including Family Day Care, After School Care and Holiday Programs. They work together with child care staff, parents and other professionals to identify positive strategies to include all children. CSRDOs are a key contact point for the Special Needs Subsidy Scheme. Contact Playworks on 9521 3300 or your local council to find your nearest CSRDO. 

Special Needs Subsidy Scheme (SNSS)

The Special Needs Subsidy Scheme is designed to enable children with high support needs to be included in child care services. Support can include equipment, training for workers or extra staffing. For more details contact your CSRDO (see above), Playworks (see below) or the Federal Department of Family and Community Services on 8626 1209.

In-Home Child Care

In-Home Child Care 1800 670 305 is for families who do not have access to a standard child care service, or where their needs cannot be met by an existing service.

Noah's Ark SET Program

Noah's Ark Specialist Equipment and Toys (SET) Program 9509 3711 provides advice and a loan service to child care services for specialist toys and equipment.


Playworks & Other Resource Agencies

Playworks 9521 3300 is a resource and training agency which promotes the inclusion of children with disabilities into child care services. Playworks provides advice, training, referrals and a library and information service. Other resource agencies include the FKA Multicultural Resource Centre 9428 4471; the Victorian Co-operative on Children's Services for Ethnic Groups (VICSEG) 9383 2533 and the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association 9416 3833.


Child Care Benefit

The Child Care Benefit is a subsidy to assist families with their child care costs. Assistance can be provided for a wide range of care, including some occasional care services and some informal care by friends or relatives (via a special registration process). For more information talk to your child care service or contact Centrelink's Family Assistance Office on 13 6150.

Preschool/Kindergarten

Your early intervention service (see page 5) should be able to assist you with information about options for preschool. In some areas, the local council co-ordinates enrolments for preschools. Options include: (i) a 'stand-alone' community-based preschool; (ii) a preschool program run within a child care centre; (iii) a preschool program run by a Specialist School (page 7). A government program, the Special Education Program-Preschool Component, is designed to provide funding to assist children with severe disabilities and complex needs to attend preschools. Assistance may include an extra support person. Contact your early intervention service, your local preschool, your nearest Preschool Field Officer (see below) or your local council. *Note: Applications for preschool disability funding are usually due September/October.* 

Preschool Field Officers

The role of Preschool Field Officers is to promote the inclusion of children with additional needs in preschools. To find your nearest Preschool Field Officer contact your early intervention service, your local council or the Association office. 



School Options

Starting school evokes many different emotions - a sense of pride in your child reaching another milestone, a sense of anticipation of new friendships and the discovering your child will do. Usually, there is also some anxiety. Will my child manage? Have we chosen the right school?

Whichever school (or combination of schools) you choose, in order to receive any extra disability education funding, you will need to discuss an application for funding in partnership with the school. These are normally due in October. Talk to your school for more details.

It is never too early to start planning. Identify the range of possible schools. Talk to people who know your child - your doctor, your early childhood service, your preschool, your friends and family and other parents. Gather any available written information from schools. Look out for information available at open days and other information forums. Interview the schools about their approach to supporting children with a disability. Assess their commitment to working with you and your child. Discuss the way any extra disability funding might be used to assist your child. Talk to other parents of children with a disability whose children are already at the school. If relevant, ask about the availability of after school care.

Every child with a disability has the right to attend their local neighbourhood school. Your child might also be eligible to attend a Specialist School. The attitude of all schools should be one of commitment to working in partnership with parents to achieve a positive and inclusive learning environment for all children.

Age for Starting School

Children are eligible to commence school at the beginning of the year if they are 5 years of age by April 30th of that year. For example, a child born in March 1998 would be eligible to start school at the beginning of 2003. However, children do not have to start school until the year in which they turn 6 years of age. For example, the parents of a child born in 1998 could choose to start the child at school in 2004, rather than 2003.


'Disability' Education Program Support Funding

The system for providing extra 'disability' funding to schools is different for government and non-government (Catholic and Independent) schools. Generally, the amount of disability funding available through Catholic and Independent schools is significantly less than that available in government schools.

Government Schools

Government policy clearly states that all children with a disability (including those with severe disabilities) should have the option of receiving a quality education through their local neighbourhood mainstream school. Once an application is deemed eligible for additional disability educational support, a level of funding is calculated based on information included in the application. The additional money is provided to the school as part of the school's 'global budget'. Parents/families have input in deciding how this money is best used for their child through Program Support Groups (see page 8).

Specialist Schools

A school where all students have a disability is known as a Specialist School. There are a range of Specialist Schools in Victoria, including some that focus on a particular disability, eg. Autism, Vision Impairment, Deaf-Blindness. Some Specialist Schools are specifically designed to assist students with a severe intellectual disability (generally defined as an IQ score under 50). These are known as Special Developmental Schools (SDS). Most children attending a Specialist School are eligible for free bus transport to and from school (see page 20). Most Specialist Schools are government-run, but there are also some independent Specialist Schools. For a list of Specialist Schools, contact your regional office of the Department of Education and Training (DET) (see page 29) or the Association office. 

Catholic & Independent Schools

For information about Catholic schools, contact the school directly or the Catholic Education Office on 9267 0228 or see www.ceo.melb.catholic.edu.au. For information about independent schools, contact the school directly or the Association for Independent Schools on 9825 7200 or see www.ais.vic.edu.au

Dual Enrolment

School options can include dual enrolment - part of the week at a Specialist School and part at a mainstream or independent school. Talk to your school to explore the possibilities.

Internet Information

The Department of Education and Training (DET) Internet site includes a range of information for families of children with a disability www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/disabil



Schools & Parents in Partnership

The key to a positive school experience for children with a disability is parents and schools working together by establishing and maintaining good communication. In government schools this process is assisted by special meetings known as Program Support Groups (PSGs). Most Catholic and Independent schools have similar meetings. In addition to PSG meetings, other options for good parent/school communication include a communication book and/or regular email communication between school staff and parents. You have a right to expect a high quality of service and communication from teachers and the school.

Booklets available from schools explain education processes (including PSGs) in more detail.

Eligibility for Disability Education Funding

The categories of eligibility for funding through the Department of Education and Training (DET) are: Physical Disability; Severe Language Disorder; Severe Behaviour Disorder; Hearing Impairment; Intellectual Disability; Visual Impairment; Autism Spectrum Disorder. Once deemed eligible under one of these categories, information from an Educational Needs Questionnaire is used to establish a level of funding provided to the school.

Note: Some types of disability eg. Acquired Brain Injury do not neatly fit into existing eligibility categories and advocacy may be required to achieve a reasonable funding outcome.

Funding Application: Initial Program Support Group (PSG)

For advocacy advice and assistance contact the Association office.

After choosing your school, the first task is to work with the school to finalise an application for funding (usually due in October). This involves the establishment of an Initial Program Support Group comprising the Principal, teacher, parent(s) or guardians and a DET representative. Parents may also request that an advocate attend PSGs. With everybody's permission, the PSG may also call on other school staff or professionals to provide additional information. Where appropriate, the child may also attend PSGs. The role of the Initial Program Support Group is (i) to provide documentation to establish the child's eligibility and (ii) to complete the Educational Needs Questionnaire. Any building/accessibility issues need to be addressed at this time. The documentation required may involve considerable parent time and energy! School support professionals (eg. psychologists) may be available to assist. The application includes a 'Student Education Program Summary Statement' detailing educational goals and strategies. This is an individual education plan you will revise and update at future PSGs.

The first Educational Planning PSG

Make sure your school provides you with a copy of the official PSG guidelines.

For applications submitted in October, DET aims to notify results and funding levels by early December. Sometimes notification is delayed. Irrespective of the timing of funding notification, a first Educational Planning PSG should occur in December. The role of this PSG is to (i) clarify educational and social goals for the student, (ii) formalise strategies to meet these goals and (iii) provide advice to the Principal on deployment of resources. In mainstream schools, not all funding has to be used to employ an integration aide. You might have other ideas about the best use of funds, eg. equipment, staff training, therapy, costs for attending excursions or school camps. Any decisions about the overall deployment of funds need to be made before the school commits to employ an integration aide.

Ongoing PSGs & Education Plans

PSGs should be held at least once per term to discuss and review your child's progress. We advocate a formal approach with a written individual education plan for each student detailing goals and implementation strategies (and a written record of all PSG meetings).

PSGs for all

A positive approach to developing and implementing individual educational plans through PSGs should be available to all children, including children with learning difficulties who do not qualify for extra disability education funding. Discuss options with your Principal.

Other sources of assistance

In addition to specific disability education funding, schools have a range of programs (eg. literacy, special learning needs) and school support professionals (eg. speech therapist, psychologist) that may be of benefit to you and your child. Ask your school for details.

Reviews, Appeals & Reappraisals

If you disagree with a DET decision or your child's situation changes significantly, you can initiate an appeal or reappraisal at any time. Contact your school. From time to time, DET or schools may initiate a formal review process.

Secondary School

See Teenagers and Towards Adulthood on page 23.



Case Management/Care Packages


Case Management - what a terrible term! We are families, not 'cases'! Case Management is when a worker is employed to help plan and manage services for a family. 'Care Packages' is a term used to describe a situation where a family is allocated funds to purchase services. Care Packages are usually targeted to families of children with high support needs. Not all families are eligible and there are often waiting lists.

Flexible Support Packages

Flexible Support Packages is a general term sometimes used to describe a range of programs including Early Choices, Making A Difference and Family Choice.

Early Choices

*for ages 0-5 years
(birth to school entry)*


The Early Choices program provides flexible support options to families who have a child with a severe disability who has high support needs and is under school age. Families may be linked with existing services or financial support may be made available to purchase services to meet particular needs. 

Early Childhood Intervention

Many early childhood intervention services offer family service co-ordination as part of their service (see page 5).


Disability Client Services (DCS)

*of the Department of
Human Services (DHS)*

DCS provides case management and other support to people with an intellectual disability in accordance with the Intellectually Disabled Persons' Services Act (IDPSA) 1986. Also, DCS assists with service co-ordination and planning for people with any other types of disability. All families of children with a disability aged 6 or above should contact DCS on 1800 783 783 to discuss service options. 

Making a Difference

for ages 6 and over

Making a Difference (MaD) provides support for families caring for a family member with a severe disability aged 6 years or older. MaD assists families to identify needs and co-ordinates services and supports to meet those needs. For details of the MaD program nearest you see our Key Regional Contacts information sheets or contact the Association office. In addition to long-term support, the MaD Program offers 'one-off' short-term assistance. If your family has a one-off need, contact your MaD provider to discuss options. 

Linkages

for all ages

Linkages is funded under the Home and Community Care (HACC) program and provides case management and funds to assist in purchasing services. Note: If you access Linkages, you cannot simultaneously use Early Choices/MaD or the Family Choice Program.

Family Choice Program

*children aged 0-17
with high medical needs*

Family Choice is a statewide program which provides support to families of children aged 0-17 years who have complex medical care needs. It assists families to keep their child/young person living at home. The support provided is flexible and tailored to meet family needs. Contact the Family Choice program at the Royal Children's Hospital on 9345 5695.

Continuity of Care Program

Continuity of Care is a statewide program which provides 'top-up' brokerage funding for families of children aged 6 or over with high medical needs. Contact Abercare 9331 9800.

Note: To be eligible you must already be receiving support from a case management program.

HomeFirst

HomeFirst provides individually tailored packages of support to assist people with disabilities to continue to live in their home or move to independent living. See page 14 for more details.

Non-government Case Management

In addition to the programs listed above, various other non-government organisations provide case management services for people with physical, sensory, intellectual, neurological disabilities and/or acquired brain injury. Contact the Association office for details.

Transport Accident Commission (TAC)

For children whose disability has occurred through a road accident, the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) has responsibility for assisting with medical expenses. This may also include care and educational support services and house modifications. TAC provides a Support Co-ordinator to assist with case management, phone 1300 654 329 (local call charge).



Counselling

The emotional stress experienced by families of children with a disability is often underestimated. It is only natural that parents, children with a disability, siblings, grandparents and extended family will from time to time need to talk about their situation with someone who really understands. Sometimes the best place to start is with other people in the same situation (see page 1). Counselling services may also be of assistance.

24-hour Telephone Counselling	Victoria's 24-hour telephone counselling and crisis services include Parent Line 13 2289, Life-Line 13 1114, Care Ring Crisis Line 136 169 and the Suicide Help Line 1300 651 251.
Grief & Loss	Grief Line 9596 7799 provides counselling to people experiencing any type of grief or loss, including grief associated with disability. The National Association for Loss and Grief 9351 0358 offers referrals to support groups and counsellors.
Genetic Counselling	Genetic Health Services Victoria (GHSV) 8341 6201 provides diagnosis and counselling for individuals and families with genetic conditions.
Community Health	Most community health services have a social worker or counsellor. See 'Community Health Centres' in the Yellow Pages.
The Bouverie Centre	The Bouverie Centre 9376 9844 offers free family counselling. They also have a specialist Acquired Brain Injury Team and a Sexual Abuse Counselling Team.
Fee for Service, Private Counsellors	There are many psychologists and other counsellors who operate on a fee for service basis. See 'Counselling - Marriage, Family and Personal' in the Yellow Pages. It might be appropriate to see a doctor, psychiatrist or psychologist for counselling. In some circumstances, part of the cost may be paid by Medicare or other health insurance. Discuss options with your doctor.
Case Management & Care Packages	Funding from case management/care packages may be used to pay for counselling for parents, children or siblings. See page 9. In some circumstances, Regional Carer Respite Centres can also assist with counselling. See page 13.
Doctors & Hospitals	Most hospitals have social workers or other services to help families of children with a disability. Ask hospital staff for details. Your doctor may be able to recommend a suitable counsellor.
Behavioural Issues	Counselling for some children with a disability may be available through the various services outlined in the section on Behavioural Issues (see page 18) and Mental Health (see page 17).
Sexuality Issues	For sexuality issues and relationship counselling contact Family Planning Victoria 9257 0133.
Sexual Assault	Contact the Centre Against Sexual Assault 9344 2210 or 1800 806 292.
Schools	Most schools have access to counsellors for children. Discuss these options with your school.
Family Support/ Relationship Counselling	For family support see 'Organisations - Family Welfare' in the Yellow Pages. For relationship counselling, contact Relationships Australia on 9205 9570. For Family Law issues, contact the Family Court 8600 3800 or the Family Law Hotline 1800 050 321.
Employment	The Return to Work program 1300 363 037 offers employment assistance for parents who have been out of the workforce for 2 years or more. For young people's employment see page 23.
Ethno-specific Organisations	Counselling and other support for families may be available from various ethno-specific welfare organisations. Check 'Organisations - Migrant' in the Yellow Pages.
Very Special Kids	Very Special Kids 9804 6222 provides counselling and other support for families of children who have a progressive life-threatening illness or disability.
Bereavement	Compassionate Friends Bereaved Parents Centre 1800 641 091 provide support for family members who have experienced the death of a son or daughter. The Centre for Grief Education 9817 7266 also provides counselling. The Royal Children's Hospital has a Family Bereavement Support Program 9345 6111.



Centrelink - Overview

The Centrelink payment system for families of children with a disability is complex, and major changes occur when a child turns 16. Every Centrelink office has a Disability Officer who is available to explain the system to you and ensure that you and your family receive every payment you are entitled to. If you require help to negotiate your way through the Centrelink maze, ask to speak with the Disability Officer at your local office (call 13 1021 to make an appointment).

Disability related Payments

for children aged
0-15 years

On page 12 (opposite) we provide some details of the following disability related Centrelink payments for children aged 0-15 years.

- Carer Allowance (Child)
- Health Care Card and Pensioner Concession Card
- Carer Payment

When a child turns 16

The Centrelink payment system for children with a disability changes when a child turns 16. See Teenagers and Towards Adulthood on page 23 for details of:

- Disability Support Pension and Youth Allowance
- Pensioner Education Supplement and Mobility Allowance
- Carer Allowance (Adult)
- Carer Payment

Other Centrelink Payments

In addition to disability-related payments, families of children with a disability may also be eligible for a range of other payments from Centrelink, including:

- Child Care Benefit (CCB). See Child Care and Preschool on page 6.
- Assistance for Isolated Children's Scheme (see page 25)
- Maternity Allowance/Maternity Immunisation Allowance (for new-born babies)
- Family Tax Benefit (Parts A and B)
- Rent Assistance
- Parenting Payment (including sole parents)
- Newstart Allowance (unemployment)

Contacting Centrelink

Centrelink's Internet site is www.centrelink.gov.au. Phone contact with Centrelink is via separate numbers for different payment types including:

- 13 1021 to make an appointment to see somebody at a Centrelink Office
- 13 2717 for people with disabilities and their parents/carers
- 13 6150 Centrelink's Family Assistance Office for Family/Parenting Payments
Child Care Benefit and Health Care Cards
- 13 1202 for information in languages other than English
- 1800 810 586 for TTY service (for hearing and speech impaired)
- 1800 050 004 feedback line for compliments, complaints and suggestions!

Review & Appeal of Centrelink Decisions

If you think a Centrelink decision is incorrect, you should contact Centrelink and ask for the decision to be reconsidered. If you are still not satisfied, you can register a complaint with Centrelink Customer Relations staff on 1800 050 004. If you are still not satisfied, you can contact the Commonwealth Ombudsman 9654 7355 and/or appeal to the Social Security Appeals Tribunal (SSAT) 1800 011 140. The SSAT is not part of Centrelink. It is an independent organisation that has the power to change Centrelink decisions, but only after a Centrelink Officer has reviewed the case. Other sources of independent advice on Centrelink issues include the Welfare Rights Unit 9416 1111 and the Association office.

Centrelink Disability Payments

Carer Allowance (Child)

*Previously known as
Child Disability
Allowance*

*Centrelink 13 2717
www.centrelink.gov.au
or contact the Disability
Officer at your nearest
Centrelink office on
13 1021*

Carer Allowance (Child) provides assistance to parents/carers who care for a child with a disability or severe medical condition in recognition of the impact of the caring role on parents/carers. The allowance is not income or assets tested. There are two levels of Carer Allowance (Child):

- **Level 1** Health Care Card. For children who require 'substantially more care and attention' compared to a child of the same age without a disability or severe medical condition, but who do not qualify for Level 2

- **Level 2** Fortnightly payment and a Health Care Card via either:

- (i) Verification that the child's disability or severe medical condition is included on a 'manifest' list of disabilities/conditions – which results in automatic qualification, or

- (ii) The child's functional ability is assessed as being below a certain standard for their age.

You need to complete a claim form (from Centrelink) and your child's doctor also completes a form. If your child does not automatically qualify, it is important that the doctor knows your child well. You may need to make an appointment with the doctor to complete the form together.

In recognition of the overall impact on a family of having more than one child with a disability, a single rate of Carer Allowance (Child) may be payable where the combined level of disability of two children in the family meets the qualifying threshold.

Health Care Card

*Centrelink's Family
Assistance Office
13 6150*

*Department of Human
Services 9616 7600
or 1800 658 521*

People in receipt of the Carer Allowance (Child) are entitled to a Health Care Card (HCC). The card is issued in the child's name and may only be used for this child's direct benefit - for example, concessions on prescriptions, dental care and eye examinations for the child.

Health Care Cards are also issued to families on low incomes. A card issued in the name of a parent can be used for a range of concessions including household energy bills. Contact Centrelink's Family Assistance Office on 13 6150 for details.

Pensioner Concession Card

Centrelink 13 2300

*Department of Human
Services 9616 7600
or 1800 658 521*

People in receipt of Carer Payment (see below), Disability Support Pension (see page 23) or Parenting Payment (single - for sole parents) are entitled to a Pensioner Concession Card which provides access to a wide range of concessions.

For information on concessions including the pamphlet 'State Concessions - Your Entitlements' phone 9616 7600, 1800 658 521 or see www.dhs.vic.gov.au/concessions.

Carer Payment for Parents/Carers of a Child or Children Under 16

*Previously known as the
Carer's Pension*

*Centrelink 13 2717
www.centrelink.gov.au
or contact the Disability
Officer at your nearest
Centrelink Office on
13 1021*

Carer Payment is an income support payment for someone who provides full-time care to a person with a disability, a person who is frail aged, or a child with a profound disability. For parents/carers of children under 16, Carer Payment can be paid to a person providing:

- full-time care for a child with a 'profound disability' or
- care for two or more children with disabilities and/or medical conditions where the combined level of care is at least equivalent to the level of care required by one child with a 'profound disability' or
- care for an adult with a disability where that adult's dependent child is under 6 or is aged 6-15 and qualifies for Carer Allowance (Child)

The carer need not live with the person being cared for but must be providing full-time care. The Carer Payment is income and assets tested. If you or your partner have significant other income or assets, you may not qualify. For more details, including the Centrelink definitions of 'profoundly disabled' and 'full-time care' contact the Association office or Centrelink.

Ages 16 and over

See Teenagers and Towards Adulthood on page 23.




Respite Care


Respite care services support families by providing parents/carers with a break from the demands of caring. There are a number of different ways in which respite may be available to families. It can involve planned, regular respite or emergency/one-off situations. It might involve in-home respite where a carer comes to your home, or out-of-home respite, where your child attends a service. It might include overnight care. Depending on your circumstances, there might also be other forms of respite available to you and your family. Anything that provides parents with a break from the demands of caring can be defined as respite. Think creatively about what would work best for your family and ask the service providers if it's possible. You never know, it might be! Besides the services listed on this page, other possible sources of respite are Child Care (page 6), Home/Personal Care & Support (page 14) and Recreation services (page 19).

Regional Carer Respite Centres (CRCs)

1800 059 059


Regional Carer Respite Centres are a good place to start for information about the range of respite services available in your area. They provide information about respite services and assistance to organise respite, including emergency respite. They also help develop long-term respite plans and provide information about other services. By phoning 1800 059 059 you will automatically be put through to your nearest Carer Respite Centre. You can also make contact via the Carers Association of Victoria 1800 242 636. 

Flexible Respite Funding

Each region has an allocation of flexible respite funding to provide necessary respite not available through other programs. Contact your Regional Carer Respite Centre. 

Home & Community Care (HACC) Services

includes
'Specific Home Care'

Home and Community Care (HACC) is a joint Federal/State program designed to provide a range of support services (including respite care) to a target group defined as 'frail older people, younger people with a disability and the carers of these people'. HACC services may include a mixture of in-home respite, home care and personal care, sometimes known as Specific Home Care. In most areas the local council is involved in the provision of HACC services. Contact your local council or the Association of  for details. *Note: Most HACC Services charge fees based on a sliding scale according to family income.*

Case Management & Care Packages

The range of Case Management and Care Packages listed on page 9 usually include respite as part of the support provided. This includes a network of respite houses run by Disability Client Services.

Other Respite Services

Various other non-government agencies run respite services that can be accessed via case management or sometimes directly by families, eg. Swonnell House for children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder phone 9773 6044. Contact your Regional Carer Respite Centre on 1800 059 059 to explore options.

Interchange

Interchange is a volunteer-based program that provides a range of respite and recreational experiences for children who have a disability. For details of the Interchange program nearest you contact Interchange Victoria on 9687 0366 or 1300 300 436.

Foster Grandparents

The Foster Grandparent Scheme 9650 7216 involves matching mature age volunteers and a child with a disability to share friendship and social/developmental activities, providing respite

Very Special Kids

Very Special Kids 9804 6222 provides respite and support for families of children with a progressive life-threatening illness.

The Shared Family Care Program

The Shared Family Care program is a Foster Care program that helps families in need of planned respite care or emergency short-term care. The program places children with trained volunteer caregivers for agreed periods. For more information contact your Regional Carer Respite Centre (see above) or the Association office.

24-hour Emergency After Hours Respite

Emergency respite services are designed to assist when you have an unexpected need for respite care. For example, if you became unwell, the service could arrange for carers to mind your children. For details of the emergency after hours respite service in your area contact your Regional Carer Respite Centre on 1800 059 059.



Home/Personal Care & Support

Home Care, Home Support, Accommodation Support, Personal Care and Attendant Care are terms used to describe a service that helps a person with a disability to undertake daily living tasks. These services assist the child with a disability and help parents/carers maintain a comfortable, healthy home environment. Examples include bathing, dressing, grooming, going to the toilet, meal-time assistance, travel training and accessing recreation services. Other sources of Home/Personal Care include Case Management/Care Packages (page 9), Respite (page 13) and Accommodation (page 22).

Home & Community Care (HACC)

Home and Community Care (HACC) is a joint Federal/State program designed to provide a range of support services, including home care, personal care, health care and support, to a target group defined as 'frail older people, younger people with a disability and the carers of these people'. In most areas the local council is involved in the provision of HACC funded respite services. Contact your local council or the Association office for details. *Note: Most HACC services charge fees based on a sliding scale according to family income.* (KRC)

'District' or 'Community' Nursing

(including Royal District Nursing Service)

District or Community Nursing involves a nurse visiting at home to provide health services. This can include after hours visits eg. visiting during the night to turn a child recovering from surgery. The Royal District Nursing Service (RDNS) is one major provider in Victoria and covers the Melbourne metropolitan area. For your nearest RDNS service phone 9536 5222. There are also other providers. Non-metropolitan hospitals and some rural community health services may also provide district or community nursing. For more information contact your regional hospital or community health service or search www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Community Health Centres

Most Community Health Centres provide a range of health care and support services. Families of children with a disability should contact their local centre about the availability and cost of services. See 'Community Health Centres and Services' in the Yellow Pages.

Royal Children's Hospital Home Based Services

Enquiries 9345 7983

The Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) provides a range of services to support children with complex health care needs at home and in the community. These include:

- Hospital in the Home – short-term alternative to in-hospital treatment for certain illnesses.
- Post Acute Care – assistance in the recovery period following hospitalisation.
- Home Care Program – a one-to-one training program for respite workers to allow children to be safely cared for at home.
- School Care Program – assessment of care needs and assistance with the development of management plans for use by school staff.
- Family Choice Program – see page 9.

Private Agencies

There are a range of private agencies which provide Home/Personal Care and Support services. For a list of private providers contact the Association office or see 'Disability Services and Support Organisations' in the Yellow Pages.

HomeFirst

HomeFirst is a program providing individually tailored packages of support to assist people with disabilities to continue to live in their home or move to independent living. The support available includes assistance with personal care, developing new independent living skills and help to participate in community activities. Children aged 6 and over may access HomeFirst. Access is via the Service Needs Register (see page 21).

Outreach

The Outreach program encompasses a range of Home/Personal Care and Support Services which offer up to 15 hrs pw of assistance for children aged 6 or over. Contact DHS Disability Client Services via your regional office of the Department of Human Services (see page 29).



Communication Needs

All children have the right to communicate their feelings, needs and dreams and to understand communication around them. Some children may require various levels of assistance to support their communication if they do not use speech or their speech is difficult to understand. This may include the use of sign and gesture, pictures or the use of technology for communication. Children with complex communication needs can access a variety of services.

Electronic Communication Devices

As part of the Victorian Aids and Equipment Program, Yooralla runs an Electronic Communication Devices Scheme 9362 6154 or 1800 686 533 for people of all ages with a complex communication needs.

School based assistance

Planning and management of resources for school age children occurs through Program Support Groups (see pages 7 and 8). This planning should include the ongoing development of your child's communication requirements to ensure maximum participation in all aspects of the school community. It may include: referral to speech therapy services or purchasing paediatric trained outreach speech therapy services (Yooralla 9359 9366 or SCOPE 9537 2611); accessing speech therapists via DHS Disability Client Services (see pages 2 and 9); technology assessment and support from Yooralla's Comtec service (see below) or the Electronic Communication Devices Scheme (above); trialing equipment; training of school personnel to support your child's communication needs. For advocacy and support contact the Communication Aid Users Society (CAUS) on 9557 5551 or our Association.

Communication Resource Centre and other services

The Communication Resource Centre (CRC) 1800 888 824 or 9843 2000, part of SCOPE Victoria, provides information and services in the areas of complex communication needs, saliva control and swallowing. Other services co-located with the CRC include Makaton Vic (key-word sign and gesture), the Gastrostomy Information Support Service (GISS) and Communication Aids and Resource Materials (CARM). Other services providing assistance to children with complex communication needs include (i) Yooralla's ComTec Disability Communication and Technology Solutions 9362 6111 or 1800 686 533 (ii) Vision Australia Technology Service 9864 9524 (iii) DEAL Communication Centre 9509 6324. For advocacy and support, contact the Communication Aid Users Society (CAUS) on 9557 5551.

Hearing Impairment

For assessment and details about the range of services for children with a hearing impairment, contact Australian Hearing Services on 13 1797.

National Relay Service

The National Relay Service 13 3677 or 1800 555 660 assists with phone calls for people who are deaf or have a speech or hearing impairment.

Telstra


Telstra's Disability Equipment Program 1800 068 424 (voice) or 1800 808 891 (TTY).




Continence Assistance

There are a variety of options available to families seeking assistance with continence issues, including assessment/treatment and help with the cost of continence products.

Continence Information

For information on continence assistance programs contact the Victorian Continence Resource Centre on 9816 8266 or the National Continence Helpline 1800 330 066. 

Children aged 5-15 years

The Disability Continence Program undertakes assessments and intervention to assist children aged 5-15 with continence issues. An annual subsidy may also be available to assist with the cost of continence products. Contact the Victorian Continence Resource Centre on 9816 8266 for details of the program provider nearest you. 

Children 16-plus

Assistance is available via the Continence Aids Assistance Scheme (CAAS) 1300 366 455.

Victorian A & EP

The Victorian A and EP (see page 16) can assist with washable continence products.

Continence Products

Suppliers of continence products include Comfort Care 5995 1212 and MediQuip 9417 7400 or 1800 816 233. Also see 'Disabled Persons' Equipment' in the Yellow Pages.



Other Aids & Equipment

Many children with special needs use different types of aids and equipment to enhance their daily living eg. wheelchairs, walking frames, special eating utensils, artificial foot orthosis (AFOs). Therapists may recommend an item or you may need to find an item yourself. In addition to the services listed here and on page 15, Case Management/Care Packages (page 9) may assist with funding for aids and equipment.

Victorian Aids & Equipment Program (A & EP)

Formerly known as the Program of Aids for Disabled People (PADP)

Victorian A & EP Guidelines can be accessed via the Links page on our Internet site www.acd.org.au

The Victorian Aids and Equipment Program assists children and adults with a disability to access subsidised aids, equipment and home modifications to enhance their safety and independence and support their family and parents/carers. You may be required to make a contribution to the cost of an item. For more information, contact:

Statewide

- Communication Devices 9362 6111
- Lymphoedema Garments 9270 2754
- Royal Children's Hospital 9345 5964

Metropolitan

- Austin Hospital 9496 4094
- Box Hill Hospital 9895 3459
- Caulfield Medical Centre 9276 6316
- Dandenong Hospital 9554 8238
- Kingston Centre 9265 1318
- Maroondah Hospital 9871 3506
- Melbourne Extended Care 8387 2251
- Monash Medical Centre 9928 8185
- Mount Eliza Centre 9788 1261
- Northern Hospital 9219 8594
- St Vincents Hospital 9288 3858
- Western Hospital (Sunshine) 8345 1267
- Williamstown Hospital 9393 0130

Non - Metropolitan

- Bairnsdale Regional Health Service 5150 3391
- Ballarat Health Services 5320 3715
- Bendigo Health Care Group 5444 6245
- Gippsland Southern Health Service 5654 2701
- Goulburn Valley Base Hospital 5832 2200
- Grace McKellar (Barwon) 5279 2281
- LaTrobe Regional Hospital (Traralgon) 5173 8383
- South West Healthcare (Warrnambool) 5563 1546
- Sunraysia Community Health Services 5023 7511
- Swan Hill District Hospital 5033 1450
- Wangaratta District Hospital 5722 0132
- West Gippsland Health (Warragul) 5623 0642
- Western District Health (Hamilton) 5571 0206
- Wimmera Health Care (Horsham) 5381 9112
- Wodonga Regional Health (02) 6051 7459
- Wonthaggi & District Hospital 5671 3333

Home Enteral Nutrition Program

Some children require alternative forms of nutrition eg. nasogastric or gastrostomy. The Home Enteral Nutrition Program provides assistance with formula, equipment and consumables. Ask your doctor/specialist or hospital staff for details.

Yooralla's Equipment Services

The Independent Living Centre (ILC) provides advice, assessment and information on aids and equipment. The Equipment Library 9362 6111 or 1800 686 533 has a loan service to 'try before you buy', and/or use equipment for short periods of time.

The Rehabilitation Equipment Centre (TREC)

TREC 9532 0611 (part of SCOPE Victoria) provides equipment and services which enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities, including wheelchair service, customised seating and hoists.

Toys & Noah's Ark

Noah's Ark 9529 1466 or 9509 3711 offers a wide range of activities including toy and equipment borrowing, playgroups and recreation. Other toy shops/suppliers include Co-ordinates Occupational Therapy 9380 1127; Windmill 9830 4336; Child and Adult 9528 1203.

Equipment Recycling Network

The Equipment Recycling Network 9879 5211 is a volunteer group providing a 'For Sale/Gift' listing of secondhand items and a 'Wanted to Buy' list. Also see www.erni.asn.au.

Technical Aid to the Disabled (TADVIC)

TADVIC 9853 8655 design, construct and modify equipment for people with disabilities, providing no commercially available product or service will meet their needs. Before contacting TADVIC, you should make a search of commercially available products. Yooralla's ILC (see above) can assist.

Private Companies

Private providers of aids and equipment include Achievable Concepts 9752 5958 and Technical Solutions 9737 9000. Also see 'Disabled Persons' Equipment' in the Yellow Pages.




Mental Health System

For details of your nearest CAMHS service, see our Key Regional Contacts information sheets or phone the Association office on 9500 1232 or 1800 654 013

The range of children and families who can be assisted through Victoria's mental health system is much broader than most people realise. It includes children with major behavioural difficulties who have not been diagnosed with a specific disability. It also includes children who may have mental health issues in addition to their other disabilities - physical, intellectual or acquired brain injury.

Victoria's Mental Health Act defines mental (psychiatric) illness as a medical condition that is characterised by a significant disturbance of thought, mood, perception or memory. Child psychiatric conditions are defined as 'conditions that adversely affect the psychosocial development of children and young people, and contribute to major interactional difficulties in their social environment.' Using these definitions, it is estimated that around 10-15% of children and young people have mental health problems (and are therefore eligible for assistance from mental health services.)

The main services available to assist Victorian families of children with mental health issues are Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). CAMHS provide free assessment and treatment, including individual and group therapy for the child, family therapy and parent counselling. CAMHS also have Mental Health Promotion Officers who work in partnership with schools and welfare services to improve community awareness and responsiveness to mental health issues for children and young people.

Any family who has a child with severe behavioural difficulties who has not yet been diagnosed should consider requesting a CAMHS assessment. For details of your nearest CAMHS service you can search www.dhs.vic.gov.au/acmh/mh/accessing_services or www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au. 

Other mental health services accessible via CAMHS include in-patient units and Intensive Mobile Youth Outreach Services (IMYOS) for adolescents. There is also a Statewide In-patient Service for children aged 0-12 at the Austin and Repatriation Medical Centre where children can be admitted for up to 5 weeks for therapy and treatment, phone 9496 5108. Families and schools are usually involved in the therapy and treatment program. All referrals are via a CAMHS service.

For parents concerned about their own mental health, see Counselling on page 10.



Child Protection System

Child Protection Crisis Line (24-hours) 13 1278

Child Protection Services are delivered through the regions of the Department of Human Services. The formally defined purpose of Child Protection Services is 'to provide child centred family focussed services to protect children and young people from significant harm as a result of abuse or neglect within the family unit and to ensure that children and young people receive services to deal with the impact of abuse and neglect on their well-being and development.' These services are provided on the principle that while the best protection for children is usually within the family, the paramount consideration is the child's safety, well-being and development.

The most common type of situation in which Child Protection would become involved is when a report is made of a parent or guardian who is suspected of abusing or neglecting a child. However, Child Protection can also become involved in situations where a child is reported to be physically violent towards their parents, especially if the situation escalates to the point where the parents and child cannot live safely together.

Child Protection Services are complemented by a range of community-based Family Support Services, including services known as 'Strengthening Families' (see page 26). There are also Placement and Support Services which provide accommodation and support to children involved in the child protection system.

In some circumstances, consideration might be given to involving Child Protection to ensure the safety of children with a disability and their families. By the time consideration is given to involving Child Protection, families will most likely have had significant contact with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (see above) or other disability/community agencies. Usually, school welfare staff are also involved. These professionals should be in a position to assist families with information about the role of Child Protection, Family Support and Placement Support Services. As always, you can ring the Association office for further advice. The Child Protection Crisis Line is 13 1278. For general parenting advice, contact your Regional Parent Resource Centre via the Victorian Parenting Centre on 9639 4111.



Behavioural Issues

The terms 'challenging behaviour' or 'difficult behaviour' are used to describe a wide range of behaviours. Avenues for getting assistance with behaviour will vary depending on family circumstances. For example, when a child is aged 6 and over and has already been diagnosed with an intellectual disability, a family may seek help through the intervention support teams of Disability Client Services eg BIST or FISS. For children who have not been previously diagnosed with a disability, the starting point might be Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (see page 17).

Early Intervention Services For children of before school age, the network of early childhood intervention services should be a source of support on behavioural issues (see page 5).

Family & Behavioural Intervention Support Teams (FISS) & (BIST) Children registered with Disability Client Services of the Department of Human Services (page 9) can access specialist behavioural intervention support teams. These are known as Family Intervention Support Service (FISS) and Behavioural Intervention and Support Teams (BIST). They provide assistance where the person with a disability displays challenging behaviour and their parents/carers are having difficulty supporting them. Contact Disability Client Services at your regional office of the Department of Human Services (page 29).

Schools and Education School Support Staff (see page 8) can provide support for students with behavioural difficulties. Also, some schools have specially designed programs to assist with behavioural issues. Contact your school, your DET regional office (see page 29) or the Association office.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) Through counselling and support from multidisciplinary staff teams, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) can be a key source of help for behavioural problems and/or learning difficulties. Do not be put off by the 'mental health' tag of CAMHS. The definition of mental health is very broad, see page 17.

Sexuality Issues Family Planning Victoria's Disability Services Unit 9257 0133 provides education and counselling services in human relations and sexuality for people with disabilities and their families. Other options for support on sexuality issues include Disability Client Services who can also refer you to other local/regional programs (see pages 2 and 29). SCOPE Victoria 9537 2611 sells booklets and teaching cards on disability and sexuality education.

Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) Headway Victoria 9642 2411 and the Brain Foundation 9882 2003 provide a free statewide information and support service for people living with ABI and their families/carers.

The Bouverie Centre The general family counselling available through the Bouverie Centre 9376 9844 may be of assistance to families of children with behavioural issues.

Parenting Centres A network of Regional Parent Resource Centres provides information, resources and support for parents and caregivers. Programs include parenting courses, some of which may address parenting issues for children with a disability and/or difficult behaviour. Phone the Victorian Parenting Centre on 9639 4111 for details of your nearest Regional Parent Resource Centre.

Other Support Groups Support groups providing some assistance on behavioural issues include: Autism Victoria 9885 0533; Autistic Family Support Association (via Autism Victoria) 9885 0533; Asperger Syndrome Support Group 9885 3760; Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder Association of Victoria (ADDVic) 1800 233 842; ACTIVE (ADHD support group) 9650 2570. For other support groups, contact the Association office or your Regional Parent Support Co-ordinator (see pages 2 and 30).

Community Health Centres Some Community Health Centres provide free or low-cost counselling and other support which may be of assistance. See 'Community Health Centres' in the Yellow Pages.

Private Options There are a number of private psychologists and other professionals who specialise in challenging behaviour. Discuss options with the networks/organisations known to you.



Recreation

As with any child, recreation for a child with a disability, can involve many things - going to the movies or a sporting event; a trip to a park with friends; playing sport; being in a youth group or club; painting or artistic activities. There are service providers who can help you with local contacts for your preferred options. If Attendant Care is required to access recreation, see page 14.

Access for All Abilities

(the AAA Program)

The Access for All Abilities (AAA) program aims to increase the participation levels and range of community-based sport and recreation opportunities for people with disabilities. There are AAA programs in each region across Victoria. Contact the Association office for details.

VICNORD

Victorian Network on Recreation & Disability

VICNORD 9489 2999 is a statewide information and advocacy organisation working with and on behalf of people with a disability of all ages to improve access and choice in recreation.

Companion Card

The Companion Card Scheme 1800 650 611 is designed to reduce the financial burden associated with admission costs to sport, entertainment and recreation venues/events for parents/carers of people who have a severe or profound disability. Approved cardholders will be entitled to be charged for one admission only, when it is necessary for the person to be assisted by a parent/carer (unpaid or paid).

VICSRAPID

(Intellectual disability)

VICSRAPID 9696 7907 provides information on sport and recreation programs for people with an intellectual disability. They also provide consultancy to sport, recreation and disability associations to assist people with disabilities to participate in sport and recreation activities.

The Arts & Venue Access

Arts Access 9699 8299 publishes the Victorian Venue Guide and operates EASE 9699 8497, a ticketing and information service on specialised seating at entertainment events. For information about disability access, contact the venue or event organiser directly. If advocacy is required, contact VICNORD or the Association office. For information about arts programs contact your AAA worker (see above).

Performing Arts Festival

'Awakenings' is a major annual national performing arts festival for people with a disability, held in Horsham. Contact festival organisers via Wimmera Uniting Care on 5362 4006.

NICAN

National Information Communication Awareness Network

NICAN 1800 806 769 provides a national information service on sport, recreation, tourism and the arts for people of all ages with disabilities. They also have information on airline discounts for parents/carers and children with a disability. Also see www.nican.com.au

Yooralla

Yooralla 9607 3501 provide recreation for children with disabilities.

Leisure Action

Leisure Action 9536 4254 (of SCOPE Victoria) provide recreation information and services.

Interchange

Interchange programs often provide camps and other recreation options. See page 13.

Holiday Programs

In most areas the local council or YMCA is involved in the organisation of holiday programs for school-age children. These programs should include children with disabilities. Contact your local council, YMCA or Playworks 9521 3300. Also see pages 6 and 23.

Playgrounds & Parks

There are a number of new or renovated playgrounds and parks that provide specially designed equipment for people with disabilities, including Hays Paddock (Melways ref 45,J2). For more information contact the Playground and Recreation Association of Victoria on 9388 1066.

Travel

Travellers Aid Disability Access Service 9654 7690 provides information, support and advocacy services to people with disabilities, and their families/carers who visit Melbourne. 'Easy Access Australia', includes information about accessible transport, accommodation and tourist attractions. For more details see www.easyaccessaustralia.com.au. Yooralla also has a Holiday and Information Service 9607 3508.

Other Recreation Programs

Examples include:

Camping Programs		Recreation Programs	
Noah's Ark	9529 1466	Riding for the Disabled	9527 7285
Kids Under Canvas	9662 2355	Wheelchair Sports Vic	9473 0133
People Outdoors	9457 6383	Sailing	9735 0852



Transport

The ability to get from point A to B at any given time is something most people take for granted. However, transport is a significant difficulty for many families of children with a disability, particularly if their child uses a wheelchair. The following programs may offer some assistance.

Buses for Specialist Schools

Most children attending Specialist Schools (see page 7) are eligible for free bus transport to and from school, providing the school attended is within a specified area related to where the child lives. Contact Specialist Schools for details of their designated transport zones.

Conveyance Allowance

Conveyance allowance is available to assist parents with travel costs where the distance to school or a bus service is greater than 4.8km (or under 4.8km for children with severe physical disabilities and/or vision impairment). Contact your school Principal or DET (see page 29).

Public Transport

Accessibility to public transport has improved in recent years, but there is still a long way to go! Gradually, the current fleet of trams and buses will be replaced by specially designed low-floor vehicles. For public transport assistance contact VicTrip on 13 16 38 (metropolitan), 13 61 96 (rural) or www.victrip.com.au. Also Travellers Aid on 9654 7690.

Multi Purpose Taxi Program

The Multi Purpose Taxi Program provides half price taxi fares for people who have a permanent disability which prevents them from independently accessing public transport. Application forms can be obtained from the Victorian Taxi Directorate office at 14-20 Blackwood Street, North Melbourne, phone 9320 4360 or 1800 638 802 or see www.taxi.vic.gov.au

Taxi Bookings

Taxis designed for people with a disability include Wheelchair Taxis (known as M50s) and Maxi-Taxis which can carry 5 or more people. To make a booking call 9277 3877 or 8431 7202. Where possible, book well ahead in the hope of avoiding delays.

Community Transport

Community transport schemes to assist families of children with a disability include Northern Care and Share 9478 5511 (Northern Region only) and the Eastern Volunteer Resource Centre 9870 7822 (Eastern Region only). For community transport in your area, contact your local council or the Victorian Community Transport Association on 9646 6277.

Mobility Allowance

Mobility Allowance is a Centrelink payment to assist people with a disability aged 16 and over who are unable to use public transport to travel to their place of study, training or work. Contact Centrelink on 13 2717. Also see page 23.

Disabled Persons' Parking Scheme

(Parking Permits)

The Disabled Persons' Parking Scheme has two categories with varying parking concessions. Application forms are available from your local council.

- **Category 1 - Blue** Permitted to park in a bay reserved for disabled parking for the specified time only, or may park a vehicle in any ordinary area for twice the specified time.
- **Category 2 - Green** Not permitted to park in special disabled parking bays but will be allowed twice the specified time when in any ordinary metre or bay.

VPTAS Victorian Patient Transport Assistance Scheme

The Victorian Patient Transport Assistance Scheme (VPTAS) assists rural Victorian residents with costs when travelling more than 100km (one way) to the nearest medical or dental specialist. People who travel over 500km per week for 5 weeks to specialist therapy are also eligible. Application forms are available from doctors surgeries, hospital social workers and your regional office of the Department of Human Services (page 29). For more information contact your regional DHS office or the VPTAS Officer at the (DHS) head office on 9616 7280.

Vehicle Modifications

Private companies who specialise in new and used vehicles and equipment to transport people with a disability include Fleetworks Mobility 9569 3166; Capital Special Vehicles 9794 8888; Norden Transport 9793 1066. Also see 'Disabled Persons' - Equipment' in the Yellow Pages. At the time of writing, there is no provision for parents of children with a disability to receive an exemption from GST for vehicle modifications. Nor are there any specific programs to assist with the cost of vehicle modifications. We hope this changes in the future!



Service Needs Register

Where the demand for a service exceeds what is available, the people involved in running the service usually attempt to design ways of 'organising the queue'. Often this involves attempts to assess levels of need and implement procedures designed to put those with the highest needs at the front of the queue. The Service Needs Register (SNR) was developed as part of an attempt by the Department of Human Services (DHS) to make decisions about priority of access to various 'long-term' accommodation and support services including HomeFirst (see page 14), Family Options (see page 22), other long-term accommodation options such as Community Residential Units (CRUs) and 'day options' for adults with a disability. Before any child can be considered for these services, they must be registered on the SNR.

What is the Service Needs Register (SNR)?

The Service Needs Register (SNR) is a confidential listing of all people with disabilities who have registered a need for long-term accommodation services, other selected long-term support services (such as HomeFirst) and 'day options'. The SNR provides a single regional entry point for people and families seeking access to these services.

The SNR is managed by Disability Client Services (DCS) in each region of DHS. DCS Regional Teams are responsible for maintaining the register and reviewing the needs and requests of people and families seeking support services. A Regional Priority Panel comprising DHS staff and community members is responsible for considering the priority/urgency of each application. The categories used are:

- Urgent – people who require support immediately.
- High Priority – people who require support within the next 12 months.
- Low Priority – people who are unlikely to require support within the next 12 months.

In order to be registered on the SNR a detailed application form needs to be submitted. Assistance may be provided by a case manager (if you have one) or other relevant support worker. Families need to be proactive in ensuring that their needs are appropriately recorded on the SNR. If the type of accommodation or other support you would prefer does not fit the 'boxes' or categories on the SNR form, we suggest you prepare a brief summary of your needs/request and insist it be included somewhere on the form or as an attachment. For more information contact DCS at your regional office of DHS on 1800 783 783 (also see page 29) or phone the Association office.

How early should I consider applying?

When it began, the SNR was focussed on requests for long-term, out-of-home accommodation, such as Community Residential Units (CRUs). Gradually, the range of services accessed via the SNR has broadened to include programs such as HomeFirst which are designed to provide intensive support to assist children aged 6 and over to remain living at home (see page 14).

Why should I register now?

Generally, access to services via the SNR only occurs for people classified as 'urgent'. If your needs are classified as 'high priority' or 'low priority', chances are you won't get access to a service unless circumstances change and your situation is reassessed as urgent. If your circumstances do change and become urgent, the time involved in administrative procedures to reassess your case is likely to be reduced if you are already on the SNR. Also in our advocacy to government for more resources to be directed to accommodation support for families, the SNR waiting list is referred to as evidence of overall need. The more families listed on the SNR, the more likely it is that the government will consider allocating more resources.

Keeping in contact

The SNR isn't a waiting list where those on it the longest are automatically at the top of the list. The urgency of needs are continually reassessed. If new people apply and are assessed as urgent, they will immediately be placed higher on the list than those assessed as high priority or low priority. If you are initially assessed as high priority or low priority, don't wait for somebody else to initiate a review. If your situation changes and becomes more urgent, contact DHS immediately and ask for your SNR status to be reviewed. It is advisable to consider initiating an SNR registration as soon as you foresee a need for an intensive support program, eg HomeFirst.



Accommodation

Accommodation is about more than just a place to live; it's about creating and maintaining a sense of 'home'. For families of children with a disability, creating a home might involve a combination of modifications and home support services (see pages 13 and 14). Also, at some stage, we all have to confront the question of our children's long-term accommodation options.

General Housing Assistance for Families

All families (including families of children with a disability) may be eligible for a range of general housing assistance programs, including The First Home Owners Scheme 13 2161; public rental housing and community/social housing; private rental assistance; bond and relocation assistance; emergency housing and rent arrears assistance. For all enquiries about rental assistance or emergency housing, contact the Tenants Union on 9416 2577 or 1800 068 860.

Home Renovation Service

For a free assessment of disability home modifications contact Archicentre on 9815 1900 or 1300 136 513. Low-cost home renovation loans are available to home owners who have a family member with a disability for preventative maintenance, repair work and modifications. For details contact the Home Renovation Service on 9616 6170 or 1800 133 324.

Accommodation Support

(including HomeFirst)

The range of disability services designed to assist families to care for and support their child living at home include Case Management and Care Packages (page 9), Respite (page 13) and Home/Personal Care (page 14). The term 'Accommodation Support' is sometimes used to describe services that provide intensive support to assist families caring for a child with a disability to live with their family or in an independent living arrangement. This includes programs such as HomeFirst (page 14).

Service Needs Register (SNR)

Access to various accommodation and support services, including HomeFirst (above) and Family Options (see below) occur via a planning/allcoation process based on the Service Needs Register (see page 21)

Long-term Care

For a variety of reasons, it may not be possible, or desirable, for a child with a disability to live full-time with their family. The decision to consider options for long-term care is difficult and emotional. Sometimes lack of access to a reasonable level of respite and other support means that families feel forced to consider long-term care options when what they really want is a better package of support services. It is usually helpful to discuss the situation with a supportive professional worker/advocate to ensure all avenues to provide family support are fully explored.

Family Options

Family Options is a program designed to provide long-term (or short term) alternative family accommodation for children with disabilities who are unable to live full-time with their own families. Family Options can include 'shared care' arrangements (where, on a permanent basis, the child spends part of the time with their birth family and the rest with an alternative carer) and other creative models of care involving support to birth families. Referrals to Family Options normally occur through the Service Needs Register (page 21).

Facility-based Accommodation

There are very few facility-based options for long-term care of children with a disability. If you have a preference for a facility-based option (eg. Community Residential Unit) rather than an alternative family-based option (eg. Family Options) you should make your choice clear at the time of completing the Service Needs Register application (page 21).

Other Options

There are some circumstances where there is no suitable alternative family accommodation available and no suitable facility-based options. These situations are treated on a case by case basis and sometimes creative solutions can be found. Families need to be clear about their preferred option and be prepared to argue their case to all key decision makers.

Child Protection

In some situations, options for alternative accommodation for a child might include placement and support services through the Child Protection System (see page 17).



Teenagers & Towards Adulthood

As our children grow into young adults, the service system changes significantly. Some things get harder! For example, school holiday/vacation care programs seem much harder to find.

Secondary School

For children attending secondary school, there are many challenges - different teachers, moving from class to class, new peer groups etc. The transition from primary school needs to be well-planned. Consideration needs to be given to developing systems for communicating with all class teachers. It is often valuable for parents to develop a good relationship with at least one 'hands-on' staff member (a teacher or year co-ordinator) who is prepared to co-ordinate communication with other teachers and be an advocate for your child. The benefits of positive communication through PSGs also applies to secondary schools (see page 8).

After School Care, Holiday & Vacation Care Programs

The need for support with after school care and holiday programs for older children is recognised by the government's commitment to fund the Child Care Benefit and the Special Needs Subsidy Scheme (see page 6) for children with a disability up to age 17. This only applies to 'Commonwealth approved' programs. If a suitable 'approved' program doesn't exist, one solution is to encourage local councils and program providers to create accessible programs and to then place pressure on the Commonwealth Government to provide a fast track 'approval' process. Contact the Department of Family and Community Services on 8626 1171.

In-Home Child Care

In-Home Child Care is for families who do not have access to a standard child care service, or where a family's needs cannot be met by an existing service. Eligibility includes teenage children with a disability who don't have access to after school/vacation care programs. Contact your nearest In-Home Child Care service via the national Child Care Hotline on 1800 670 305.

Recreation

Explore options with your Access for All Abilities (AAA) worker (see page 19).

Sexuality

For advice on sexuality issues contact Family Planning Victoria's Disability Unit on 9257 0133.


Turning 16 & Centrelink

When a child turns 16, the Centrelink payment system changes. You will no longer receive Carer Allowance (Child). Instead, Centrelink will 'invite' you to be assessed for Carer Allowance (Adult) which is similar, but with different eligibility criteria. You also need to explore your child's eligibility for the Disability Support Pension (and re-examine your eligibility for Carer Payment, as eligibility is different when your child turns 16). If your child doesn't qualify for the pension, the options are Youth Allowance or continuation of Family Tax Payments. Yes, it's complicated! Soon after your child's 15th birthday, we suggest you make an appointment with a Centrelink Disability Officer (phone 13 1021) to plan for when your child turns 16. Other Centrelink payments include Mobility Allowance (for help with travel to study, training or work), Education Entry Payments and Pensioner Education Supplement.

Contenance

At age 16, Contenance Assistance programs change from State to Federal (see page 15).

Futures for Young Adults & Adult Options

Futures for Young Adults (Futures) is designed to assist in the move from school to adult options. The young person and their family are supported to choose options based on their interests and abilities. Funds are available to assist. Futures is for all young people with a disability who are/were eligible for disability education funding (see page 7). Futures planning occurs during the year in which a young person turns 18. For more information contact the Futures Contact Officer at your regional office of the Department of Human Services (page 29).
Note: Don't be constrained by what exists. Futures is meant to provide a range of activities individually designed for your child's needs and interests. If existing programs don't cater for your child, insist on the development of new creative options. 

Accommodation

(See page 22 and the Service Needs Register on page 21.)

Guardianship

(See Legal Issues on page 24 for guardianship, administration, wills and powers of attorney.)

Employment

For disability-related employment assistance contact a Centrelink Disability Officer on 13 1021 or the Disability Employment Action Centre (DEAC) 9650 2533.



Legal Issues

There are a variety of situations in which your family may require legal advice. You might need to pursue legal avenues (eg. Equal Opportunity/Disability Discrimination) to obtain the service your child needs. Sometimes a formal complaint process is required to address issues about quality of service. Also, we all ultimately face legal issues when making a will and considering our child's future.

Villamanta Legal Service

Villamanta 5229 2925 or freecall 1800 014 111 is a statewide community legal service specialising in disability-related legal issues. They provide free telephone advice and referral.

Disability Discrimination Laws

There are two key disability discrimination laws, the Federal Disability Discrimination Act and the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act. In pursuing a case of discrimination, consideration needs to be given as to which Act is better to use. The Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) 9281 7100, 1800 134 142 is responsible for investigating complaints under the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) 1300 656 419 is responsible for complaints lodged under the Disability Discrimination Act. Both EOC and HREOC will help you assess which act is better for your particular situation.

Disability Discrimination Legal Service

The Disability Discrimination Legal Service 9602 4877 or free call 1800 651 275 (rural Victoria only) provides legal advice and assistance with the lodging and investigation of complaints under both the Disability Discrimination Act and the Equal Opportunity Act.

The Intellectual Disability Review Panel

The Intellectual Disability Review Panel 8601 5244 or 1800 641 038 is an independent organisation that reviews decisions made by the Department of Human Services and its funded agencies (including eligibility for services and the content of individual/family service plans) for people with an intellectual disability of all ages and children with developmental delay.

The Ombudsman

An Ombudsman's job is to impartially investigate complaints about decisions made by services to see if they are unjust, unlawful, discriminatory or unfair and assist in resolving them. For complaints about the services of State Government departments or local government, contact The Ombudsman Victoria on 9613 6222. For Federal Government Departments and services, contact the Commonwealth Ombudsman on 9654 7355 or 1300 362 072. For other Ombudsman (eg. banking) see Ombudsman in the White Pages.

Community Legal Centres

Free legal advice on any issue is available from Victoria's network of Community Legal Centres 9602 4949. Also try Victorian Legal Aid 9269 0120, 1800 677 402 or www.legalaid.vic.gov.au

Private Lawyers

The Law Institute 9607 9550 or 9607 9311 has a referral service to put you in touch with a private lawyer and provide one free consultation.

Guardianship & Administration

Guardianship is where a person is appointed to make personal and lifestyle decisions for an adult (aged 18 or over) with a disability. Administration is where a person is appointed to make legal and financial decisions for a person with a disability. The appointment of a Guardian or Administrator can occur on application to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Guardianship List 9628 9911 or 1800 133 055 but only if it is the 'least restrictive' option. Usually, where parents remain closely involved in the life of their child (and there are no disputes between parents and the child) there is no need for anybody to consider formal guardianship or administration procedures.

Wills & Estate Planning

There are various private law firms which specialise in wills and estate planning for parents of children with a disability. One of these, Swan Jones Quay (SJQ Services) 9670 8133 regularly publishes free guides and booklets on the Internet www.sjq.com.au

Office of the Public Advocate

The Office of the Public Advocate 9603 9500 or 1800 136 829 is an independent, statutory organisation that represents the interests of people with disabilities and families. They can investigate and assist with complaints about services and provide individual advocacy.


Family Law

For Family Law information phone the Women's Legal Service Victoria 9642 0343 or 1800 133 302, the Family Law Hotline 1800 050 321 or the Family Court 8600 3800.



Other Assistance - Disability

This page includes a range of services which don't fit neatly under any of the previous headings used in Through the Maze.

Regional Disability Support Initiative (RDSI) Grants	Regional Disability Support Initiative (RDSI) grants are designed to provide 'one-off' assistance to people with a disability and their families whose needs cannot be met by other existing programs. The maximum RDSI grant is \$5000. Contact Disability Client Services at your regional office of the Department of Human Services (page 29).
Tax Office	You might be eligible for a Medical Expenses Tax Rebate under section 159(p) of the Income Tax Act. Ask your accountant or phone the Tax Office on 132 861 or see www.ato.gov.au
Siblings	Contact the Association office for information on sibling support programs.
Giftedness & Disability	Giftedness can sometimes co-exist with disability. For more information contact the Gifted Resource Centre 9723 5266.
Variety Club	The Variety Club 9348 0633 is a worldwide charity dedicated to helping 'sick, disabled and disadvantaged' children under 18, including assistance with aids and equipment.
Computers	Schools sometimes have access to second-hand computers for home use. The Variety Club may be able to help with software. Also see www.greenpc.com.au or try the Equipment Recycling Network 9879 5211 or www.erni.asn.au
Service Clubs & Philanthropic Trusts	Financial help can sometimes be obtained from Service Clubs, eg. Lions, Rotary. Some philanthropic trusts may help with one-off items, but they often require applicants to have tax deductible status, meaning they will consider funding organisations but not individual families.
Media	Sometimes the only option to secure necessary assistance is via an appeal through the media. Contact the Association office for advice.
Rural Access	The Rural Access Program aims to mobilise support and resources to assist people with disabilities and their families to fully participate in the community. 
Council Disability Committees	Most local councils have a Disability Advisory Committee to hear from residents about disability issues and improvements needed to services. Contact your local council for details.
Isolated Children Scheme	This scheme helps students under 16 who are unable to attend an 'appropriate school', because of geographical isolation, health or educational needs. Contact Centrelink on 13 2318.
Advocacy	Individual Advocacy is where someone assists you to advocate for the needs of your child and family and/or takes up a matter on your behalf eg. negotiating with your child's school; ringing a case manager to suggest improvements in their service. Advocates might include friends, family, other parents or professional advocates/community workers. Besides our own Association and Regional Parent Support Co-ordinators (see page 2 and 30), organisations offering assistance with advocacy include: Villamanta Legal Service 5229 2029; Disability Discrimination Legal Service 9602 4877; Office of the Public Advocate 9603 9500; Action on Disability within Ethnic Communities (ADEC) 9383 5566; STAR Victoria 9650 2730; Action for Community Living 9489 2999; Blind Citizens Australia 9521 3433; Communication Aid User Society 9553 8390; Headway Victoria 9642 2411; Victorian Council of Deaf People 9650 6786 (TTY via Relay Service 13 3677). Regionally-based advocacy services include: Gippsland Disability Resource Council 5127 9171; Disability Advocacy and Information Service (Wodonga) (02) 6056 2420; Grampians Disability Advocacy Association 5352 2722; Southwest Advocacy Association (Warrnambool) 5561 4584; Barwon Disability Resource Council 5221 8011; Region Information and Advocacy Council (4 locations in Loddon-Mallee Region) 5822 1944 or 1800 221 944. Also see 'Citizen Advocacy' in the White Pages.



Other Assistance - General

In addition to services specifically designed for people with a disability, there are a range of general services which families of children with a disability may choose to use. A comprehensive list of community services, including a local and regional search capacity can be found at the Info-X-Change www.infoxchange.net.au

Ambulance

All Health Care Card holders are eligible for free Ambulance travel. People not in receipt of a Health Care Card need to subscribe to the Ambulance Service to ensure free ambulance travel. Contact the Ambulance Service on 1800 648 484. To call an ambulance phone 000.

Alcohol & Drugs Information

Contact Direct Line (part of Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre) on 9416 1818 or 1800 136 385. Also see 'Drug and Alcohol Counselling' in the Yellow Pages.

Community Information

For your local Community Information Centre contact Community Information Victoria 9670 1233 or see 'Information Services' in the Yellow Pages.

Community Legal Centres

For your nearest service contact the Federation of Community Legal Centres on 9602 4949 or see 'Community Advisory Services' and 'Legal Support Services' in the Yellow Pages.

Dental Services

Dental Health Services Victoria 9341 0222 has details of subsidised public dental programs.

Domestic Violence

Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service 9373 0123 or 1800 015 188.

Education Costs

For families on low incomes, there is an Education Maintenance Allowance (ask your school) and the Smith Family Learning for Life Programs 9419 7666 or 1800 633 622.

Eye Care Services

For Health Care Card holders of 6 months or more, low-cost glasses are available through the Victorian College of Optometry 9349 7455 for Melbourne metropolitan residents. A similar service is available from the Eye and Ear Hospital 9929 8666. For low-cost services in country areas phone the Victorian Eye Care Service on 9349 7434.

Family Support & Parenting

For details of Family Support Services, including 'Strengthening Families', contact the Children's Welfare Association of Victoria 9614 1577 or check 'Organisations-Family Welfare' and 'Counselling - Marriage, Family and Personal' in the Yellow Pages. For other parenting information and services, phone the Victorian Parenting Centre on 9639 4111.

Family Planning

Contact Family Planning Victoria 9257 0100 or see 'Family Planning' in the Yellow Pages.

Financial Assistance

Contact your local Community Information Centre 9670 1233. Also see 'Charities and Charitable Organisations' and 'Organisations - Disadvantaged Groups Aid' in the Yellow Pages. The Utility Relief Grants Scheme provides one-off assistance to people in financial crisis for gas, electricity or water bills. Contact your utility company or phone the Concessions Unit of the Department of Human Services (DHS) on 9616 7600 or 1800 658 521. There is also a Capital Grants Scheme to assist people in financial crisis to repair or replace water, gas or electrical appliances.

Financial Counselling

For your nearest community-based non-profit financial counselling service phone 9614 5433. Also see 'Community Advisory Services' in the Yellow Pages.

Gamblers Help

Gamblers Help Line 1800 156 789.

Housing

For information about emergency housing and other public and private rental housing assistance programs, contact the Tenants Union of Victoria on 9419 2577 or 1800 068 860.

Koori/Aboriginal Services

Phone the Association office for a list of Koori/Aboriginal services.

Migrant Resource Centres

See 'Organisations-Migrant' in the Yellow Pages or contact the Association office.

Neighbourhood Houses

Contact the Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres on 9654 1104 or see 'Community Centres' in the Yellow Pages.

Sexual Assault

For details of your nearest service, contact the Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) 9344 2210 or after hours 9349 1766 or 1800 806 292.



Advocacy Tips

Our approach to parent support is to provide information and advice to help you be your own best advocate. It's not easy being an advocate for your child. It's often a case of constantly battling and wondering why does it have to be this difficult or why do I have to battle for every little thing? However, we also see many success stories - parents who, once armed with information and some tips on how to negotiate, become very good at organising the services they need for their child and family.

At the Association for Children with a Disability we are available to assist in negotiations with services, government departments and politicians on issues of concern to families.

For details of other options for assistance with advocacy see page 25.

General Principles

- Be calm and positive! Be clear on what you want.
- Gather any relevant facts, figures or documents necessary to argue your case.
- Think about the sort of arguments others may use and how you might best respond.
- If you are negotiating on the phone, always make sure you know the name and position of the person you are speaking to so you can follow up with them next time if needed.
- Don't always expect conflict. Others might agree with you! But be prepared with a positive strategy if you do strike conflict.
- Don't allow others to intimidate you. Listen carefully. If necessary, counter arguments with facts. Don't get into personal attacks on individuals.
- If you need to draw on strong emotion, that's OK!
- Ask for important issues and decisions to be formally recorded in writing. Note the issues you've agreed on, and try and find a strategy for dealing with any disagreements.
- Make sure there is an agreed process for follow-up. Be prepared that you may need to do some specific follow-up to ensure that the things which are agreed to are done.
- You might like to consider taking another person to advocate on your behalf, but if you're well organised and prepared, chances are that the best advocate for you and your family is you!

Listening to children

All children, even those with very high support needs, have ways of communicating their needs, wishes and opinions. In your role as an advocate, it is important to continually consider ways of ensuring that the child's needs and wishes are heard in the advocacy process. In situations where you become aware of a significant difference in the advocacy goals of a child and other family members, consideration may need to be given to establishing a process where the child and parents/family have separate advocates.

Senior Staff and Politicians

If you have concerns about lack of service or quality of service, speak to the person delivering the service directly, eg. the intake workers, class teacher, therapist etc. On many occasions problems can be resolved at this level.

- If you still have concerns speak to their supervisor, team leader or Principal.
- The next step is to speak to the Regional or Head Office of the service and to put your concerns in writing.
- Send a copy to your Local Member of Parliament and the relevant Minister. Include a personally addressed covering letter asking them to assist.
- Also consider making an appointment to see your Local Member of Parliament. Don't be afraid to be assertive. Ask them to be active in fixing the problem. It's their job to help you!
- At any stage, contact our Association or another advocacy service for assistance and advice.

You can obtain lists of Members of Parliament by phone or Internet:

*State Government
Phone 9651 8911
www.parliament.vic.gov.au*

*Federal Government
Phone (02) 6277 7111
www.aph.gov.au*

There are also listings in the White Pages under 'Parliament of Victoria' and 'Commonwealth Parliament Offices'.

Local Government Areas (LGAs)

by Department of Human Services Regions

Many services are organised according to regional boundaries of the Department of Human Services (DHS). This listing is designed to help you find out which DHS Region you are in. Contact details for DHS regional offices are on page 29.

DHS Regions



1. Barwon South Western
2. Eastern Metropolitan
3. Gippsland
4. Grampians
5. Hume
6. Loddon Mallee
7. Northern Metropolitan
8. Southern Metropolitan
9. Western Metropolitan

Key Regional Contacts information sheets

Our Key Regional Contacts information sheets are an essential companion to *Through the Maze*. Copies are available on our Internet site www.acd.org.au or contact the Association office.

Eastern Metro

Boroondara
Knox
Manningham
Maroondah
Monash
Whitehorse
Yarra Ranges

Northern Metro

Banyule
Darebin
Hume
Moreland
Nillumbik
Whittlesea
Yarra

Southern Metro

Bayside
Cardinia
Casey
Frankston
Glen Eira
Greater Dandenong
Kingston
Mornington Peninsula
Port Phillip
Stonnington

Western Metro

Brimbank
Hobsons Bay
Maribyrnong
Melbourne
Melton
Moonee Valley
Wyndham

Barwon/South Western

Colac-Otway
Corangamite
Glenelg
Greater Geelong
Moyne
Queenscliffe
Southern Grampians
Surf Coast
Warrnambool

Gippsland

Bass Coast
Baw Baw
East Gippsland
Latrobe
South Gippsland
Wellington

Grampians

Ararat
Ballarat
Golden Plains
Hepburn
Hindmarsh
Horsham
Moorabool
Northern Grampians
Pyrenees
West Wimmera
Yarriambiack

Hume

Alpine
Benalla
Greater Shepparton
Indigo
Mansfield
Mitchell
Moir
Murrindindi
Strathbogie
Towong
Wangaratta
Wodonga

Loddon-Mallee

Buloke
Campaspe
Central Goldfields
Gannawarra
Greater Bendigo
Loddon
Macedon Ranges
Mildura
Mount Alexander
Swan Hill



DHS & DET Contact Numbers

There are various situations where families may need to contact offices of the Department of Human Services (DHS) or the Department of Education and Training (DET):

Department of Human Services (DHS)

If you need to put an issue in writing to the Regional Office of the Department of Human Services, we suggest you address it to the Regional Director and send copies to the Head Office Divisional Director, the relevant Minister and your local Member of Parliament. Include an additional cover letter specifically asking each of them to respond and assist, especially the Minister.

Head Office

Street Address: 555 Collins Street, Melbourne, 3000
Postal Address: GPO Box 4057, Melbourne, 3001
Phone: 9616 7777 Disability Services: 9616 7962
Internet Site: www.dhs.vic.gov.au or www.dhs.vic.gov.au/disability
Minister for Community Services: Phone: 9616 7500 Fax: 9616 8866

Regional Offices

- **Eastern Region**
PO Box 2015,
BOX HILL, 3128
Phone: 9843 6000
Fax: 9843 6100
Disability Services:
1800 783 783
- **Northern Region**
PO Box 1332, COLLINGWOOD, 3066
Phone: 9412 5333
Fax: 9412 5300
Disability Services:
1800 783 783
- **Southern Region**
122 Thomas St, DANDELONG, 3175
Phone: 9213 2111
Fax: 9213 2400
Disability Services:
1800 783 783
- **Western Region**
PO Box 224,
FOOTSCRAY, 3011
Phone: 9275 7000
Fax: 9275 7200
Disability Services:
1800 783 783
- **Barwon SW Region**
PO Box 760,
GEELONG, 3220
Phone: 5226 4540
Fax: 5226 4908
Disability Services:
1800 783 783
- **Gippsland Region**
PO Box 1661, TRARALGON, 3844
Phone: 5177 2500
Fax: 5177 2577
Disability Services:
1800 783 783
- **Grampians Region**
PO Box 712,
STH BALLARAT 3550
Phone: 5333 6669
Fax: 5333 6091
Disability Services:
1800 783 783
- **Hume Region**
PO Box 460, WANGARATTA, 3677
Phone: 5722 0555
Fax: 5722 0550
Disability Services:
1800 783 783
- **Loddon-Mallee Region**
PO Box 513,
BENDIGO, 3552
Phone: 5434 5555
Fax: 5434 5671
Disability Services:
1800 783 783

Department of Education and Training (DET)

If you have been unable to resolve issues at the school level, contact the Disability and Welfare Manager at your DET regional office. If further action is required, put your issue in writing to the General Manager of the Region. Also send copies to the Director of Schools at Head Office, the Minister for Education and your local Member of Parliament. Include an additional cover letter asking each of them to respond and assist.

Head Office

Street Address: 33 St Andrews Place, East Melbourne, 3002
Postal Address: GPO Box 4367, Melbourne, 3001
Telephone: 9637 2000 Disability Program: 9637 2013 or 2014
Internet Site: www.eduvic.vic.gov.au or www.sofweb.vic.edu.au
Minister for Education: Phone: 9637 3242 Fax: 9637 3030

Regional Offices

- **Eastern Metropolitan**
Level 2, 29 Lakeside Dve
BURWOOD EAST, 3151
Phone: 9881 0200
Fax: 9881 0243
- **Southern Metropolitan**
PO Box 5,
DANDENONG, 3175
Phone: 9794 3555
Fax: 9794 3500
- **Northern Metropolitan**
Locked Bag 88, FAIRFIELD, 3078
Phone: 9488 9488
Fax: 9488 9440
- **Western Metropolitan**
PO Box 57,
CARLTON SOUTH, 3053
Phone: 9291 6500
Fax: 9291 6555
- **Barwon South Western**
PO Box 240
NORTH GEELONG, 3215
Phone: 5279 4444
Fax: 5277 9926
- **Loddon Mallee**
PO Box 442,
BENDIGO, 3552
Phone: 5440 3111
Fax: 5442 5321
- **Gippsland**
PO Box 381,
MOE, 3825
Phone: 5127 0400
Fax: 5126 1933
- **Goulburn North Eastern**
PO Box 403,
BENALLA, 3672
Phone: 5761 2100
Fax: 5762 5039
- **Central Highlands Wimmera**
Level 1, 1220, Sturt Street
BALLARAT, 3350
Phone: 5337 8444
Fax: 5333 2135