

# **House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs**

## **Inquiry into Educational Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students**

**Children and Young People with Disability Australia  
Submission – November 2016**

## INTRODUCTION

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs Inquiry into *Educational Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students*. This submission focuses on key issues of relevance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with disability.

The value and importance of education is deeply embedded in the Australian community and internationally. The benefits of education to children and young people in providing opportunities for future social and economic participation is widely recognised and clearly established in research evidence.<sup>1</sup> This is also reflected in current international human rights namely the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC). Australia is a signatory to the CRC which clearly articulates the rights of ALL children to access and participate in education.<sup>2</sup> Despite this, the current education experiences of students with disability in Australia are extremely poor.

It is the view of CYDA that the present education system does not adequately meet the needs of students with disability. A typical education experience for students with disability involves discrimination, limited or no funding for support, inadequately trained staff, and a systemic culture of low expectations, exclusion and bullying. There are also increasing incidents of restraint and seclusion reported to CYDA.

Experience and available data, whilst limited, demonstrates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience higher rates of disability than non-Indigenous children. However, a range of social and cultural factors often result in disability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children not being recognised or disclosed.<sup>3</sup>

It is critical that the needs and circumstances Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with disability are included within the present inquiry and broader education reform. This submission discusses current barriers within the education system for students with disability and specific considerations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY AUSTRALIA

CYDA is the national representative organisation for children and young people with disability, aged 0 to 25 years. The organisation is primarily funded through the Department of Social Services and is a not for profit organisation. CYDA has a national membership of 5500.

CYDA provides a link between the direct experiences of children and young people with disability to federal government and other key stakeholders. This link is essential for the creation of a true appreciation of the experiences and challenges faced by children and young people with disability.

CYDA's vision is that children and young people with disability living in Australia are afforded every opportunity to thrive, achieve their potential and that their rights and interests as individuals, members of a family and their community are met.

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<sup>1</sup> Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2016, *Education at a Glance 2016: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations General Assembly 1989, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Article 28.

<sup>3</sup> First Peoples Disability Network 2013, *Ten-Point Plan for the Implementation of the NDIS in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities*, Sydney, viewed 23 November 2016, <https://goo.gl/8KcZCZ>.

CYDA's purpose is to advocate systemically at the national level for the rights and interests of all children and young people with disability living in Australia and it undertakes the following to achieve its purpose:

- **Listen and respond** to the voices and experiences of children and young people with disability;
- **Advocate** for children and young people with disability for equal opportunities, participation and inclusion in the Australian community;
- **Educate** national public policy makers and the broader community about the experiences of children and young people with disability;
- **Inform** children and young people with disability, their families and care givers about their citizenship rights and entitlements; and
- **Celebrate** the successes and achievements of children and young people with disability.

CYDA is inundated with concerns regarding education and has undertaken extensive advocacy to progress greater understanding and awareness of the direct experiences of students with disability and the critical need for reform in education. This has included contribution to a broad range of inquiries, consultations and membership of related advisory bodies.<sup>4</sup>

## EDUCATION EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY

Students with disability typically contend with profound barriers and disadvantage within the Australian education system. Direct experiences reported to CYDA demonstrate that poor and compromised education experiences are currently the norm for students with disability. These experiences are reflected in available statistics, which illustrate significant disparities in educational attainment and outcomes of students with disability in comparison to their peers without disability:

- 45.8% of people aged 15 to 64 years with disability's highest level of education was Year 10 or below, compared to 25.7% of people without disability;<sup>5</sup>
- 41% of people with disability have completed Year 12, compared to 62.8% of people without disability;<sup>6</sup>
- 17% of people with disability have completed a Bachelor Degree or higher compared to 30.1% of people without disability;<sup>7</sup>
- 38% of young people aged 15 to 24 years with disability either work, study, or do a combination of both on a full time basis compared to 56% of young people without disability;<sup>8</sup> and
- The labour force participation rate for people with disability is 53.4% compared to 83.2% for people without disability.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Further information about CYDA's work in the area of education is available at <http://www.cda.org.au/>.

<sup>5</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016, 'Table 7.3 Persons Aged 15 Years and Over, Living in Households, Disability Status, by Selected Social Characteristics—2015, Proportion of Persons,' *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2015*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>6</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2015*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, viewed 23 November 2016, <https://goo.gl/cXkD3a>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012, *Australian Social Trends*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, viewed 23 November 2016, <https://goo.gl/u0oAlp>.

<sup>9</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016, 'Table 9.3 Persons Aged 15–64 Years, Living in Households, Disability Status, by Sex and Labour Force Status—2012 and 2015, Proportion of Persons,' *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2015*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

The impact of inadequate education provision on the life outcomes for these children and young people is profound. CYDA is concerned that the present education system is not providing students with disability with the necessary knowledge, skills and resources to support future meaningful social, community and economic participation.

Below is a summary of key barriers and challenges experienced by students with disability within the present Australian education system, including direct experiences of students. It draws extensively from CYDA's submission to the 2015 Inquiry into *Current Levels of Access and Attainment for Students with Disability in the School System, and the Impact on Students and Families Associated with Inadequate Levels of Support*. This submission is also provided for the Committee's consideration (see Appendix A).

**Systemic Culture of Low Expectations** – Commonly held attitudes within the Australian community position disability as a negative, with assumptions often been made about limitations regarding what and how students with disability will learn and what their future life opportunities will be. Further, poor educational attainment is often attributed to the impact of disability.

*At the special school I attend, I'm treated like an idiot, like I can't do what other kids can do. Their expectations of me are very low. They don't treat me like an individual – Student, 15 years.*

*They would get us to watch DVD's for sport and other lessons, which were for little kids not a 16 year old. At lunch and recess every day I was in the library on computers. I want to be treated like other students – Student, 16 years.*

**Inadequate Funding** – Students with disability are typically not able to access sufficient resourcing and funding within the Australian education system to ensure appropriate curriculum accommodations and adjustments.

*Under the current funding arrangements, (my son) is not entitled to any additional support or funding. He is not getting the level of support he needs.*

*As parents, we fund and install the equipment for our child. The school does not have the funds to pay for modifications to the school.*

**School Choice** – School choice for students with disability is highly limited. Students with disability are frequently denied enrolment in their local school. Schools often state they 'do not have the capacity to support students with disability.' In other cases, families are made to feel so unwelcome or that their child would be such an inordinate burden that they are deterred from pursuing enrolment.

*We have tried removing (my son) from the special school as he is very unhappy but none of our local primary schools will accept him.*

*We have received comments such as "I don't think our students would tolerate this disruption to their education and their parents certainly wouldn't." We were clearly told that if our daughter were enrolled, several other families would leave and the school was not prepared to let that happen.*

**School Attendance** – Students with disability frequently experience discrimination in relation to school attendance. Schools often stipulate attendance cannot be fulltime and state this is due to lack of resources or capacity of the school.

*Due to (my son's) disability he was only offered 1.5 hours a day in the art room away from other kids.*

*We were advised that our daughter would need to be enrolled part time this year as the school couldn't afford full time aide support.*

CYDA is also increasingly being informed of students being home schooled or enrolling in distance education due to the sustained failure of the education system to meet their needs. However, the lack of national data prevents an accurate picture of this issue. Again, this trend demonstrates that the school system is failing to meet the needs of students with disability.

*The system failed my son. I feel I had no choice but to pull him out of mainstream school to home school with no support.*

*My son...needs a one to one scribe 80% of the time to help with decoding information and especially for maths. I was told this is impossible and we tried four schools. I now home school, which was not my choice!*

**Workforce capacity**– Workforce capacity is of critical importance in ensuring access to a quality education for all students. Educational staff, particularly teachers and leadership positions within schools such as principals and year level coordinators, are key gatekeepers in terms of access to education. However, a lack of expertise regarding inclusive education and meeting the needs of students with disability among education staff is frequently reported to CYDA. It is CYDA's experience that a lack of understanding about inclusive education, including valuing difference as a positive, is common. This informs negative attitudes that position disability as inability.

Further, CYDA is frequently informed of education staff lacking the required expertise to meet the specific educational needs of each student. In many cases, this involves inadequate knowledge of the individual student and developing supports and adjustments to ensure opportunities for learning. This represents a key barrier to students with disability accessing education.

Another consequence of the lack of expertise within schools is the misidentification of behaviour support needs, with students frequently being viewed and treated as 'naughty.' Often, a disciplinary response to a student's behaviour support needs leads to use of punishment, including suspension and expulsion, rather than providing appropriate support.

*Staff are ill equipped to provide the right support and are knocking back training and new strategies to help my son. As a result he accesses less than 10% of the curriculum, the school has become a baby sitting service. My son is missing out and falling further behind.*

*School staff do not understand my child's needs and label him as naughty.*

**Exclusion** – Students with disability frequently experience exclusion in education settings. This includes complete exclusion from an educational setting, such as denied enrolment, as well as exclusion from particular aspects of the curriculum or school activities such as camps or sports days. There can also be a refusal of the school to make accommodations to ensure the student can participate, exclusion from classwork, activities and extracurricular activities or partial enrolment.

This directly restricts opportunities for participation in learning and represents a barrier to accessing a quality education.

*My child was excluded from the drama group, the choir, sport and a talent quest just in case he embarrassed the school.*

*Sometimes staff find it easier not to include (my son) and let the school officer "look after him," like a babysitter.*

**Accountability** – The present education system provides limited accountability for students with disability in relation to academic and other learning outcomes. No consistent means of measuring the academic progress of students with disability who require modified curriculums exists. Many existing measures of student attainment in the school system, including the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) or the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) allow exclusions, with students with disability often not being included.

Some students have individual education programs but these contain goals that are established, implemented and evaluated by schools. There is a prevailing concern that there is no objective input into this process. In many jurisdictions the development of an individual education plan (IEP) is not mandatory.

*(My son) was asked in Grade six not to attend NAPLAN testing. This in turn denied him access to literacy help in high school.*

*Meetings (to develop my child's IEP) were scheduled twice a year. These meetings were almost always late, sometimes by months. The agreed actions were often never instigated or acted upon by the school. Most years the IEP was a tick and flick exercise by the school that had very little practical outcomes.*

**Post School Transition** – Post school transition refers to the period in which young people informally or formally consider and prepare for post school life. It is reported to CYDA that post school transition is typically a variable and ad hoc process for students with disability.<sup>10</sup> This time is fraught with limited information and negative attitudes from schools, employment programs and further education providers. Valuable opportunities such as work experience or part time employment are also frequently denied.

*Career planning in years 10 and 11 was quite minimal and tokenistic. There was nothing in particular that prepared me as a student with disability – Young person.*

*I was never encouraged to achieve and found the expectations were very low for me – Young person.*

**Abuse** – CYDA is frequently informed of students with disability experiencing abuse in education settings. This includes blatant examples that are clearly defined as abuse, such as physical and sexual assault. However, students with disability also experience incidents that are often not considered abuse because the child involved has a disability. Restraint and seclusion that is justified as

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<sup>10</sup> Children and Young People with Disability Australia 2015, *Post School Transition: The Experiences of Students with Disability*, Melbourne.

'behaviour management' is an example of this. Another example is students being denied the opportunity to use the toilet while on a school excursion.

*Our son has been restrained in a chair that is bolted to a large piece of timber continuously throughout his day. He is only removed when taken to the toilet, where once again he is strapped to the toilet, or for outside play. While he is in class he is restrained at all times.*

*My son has been sprayed with water to 'stop' a behaviour. He had his face held by an aide to teach him to look him in the eye. He was locked in a room alone with a ceiling fan going for most of the day, when I collected him he was on the floor asleep in his own vomit.*

**Bullying** – Bullying represents a persistent and chronic experience for many students with disability. This was clearly illustrated in CYDA's 2016 survey of the education experiences of students with disability, which found 52% of students with disability experience bullying.<sup>11</sup> This is significantly higher than the 27% of the total student population who report bullying.<sup>12</sup>

*The bullying has been disgusting - physical and mental. The Principal stated that the 'zero tolerance' policy for bullying was only for 'normal kids' and that 'weird kids' had to expect to be bullied. My son has experienced bullying from the minute he began school and he has missed a lot of school because of it.*

*(My son is) severely bullied every day. The school took no action EVER. It was reported to police on three occasions and still the school took no action.*

**Complaint Mechanism** – Presently, there is no timely, independent mechanism for students and families to pursue complaints regarding education experiences. Further, families frequently report that schools and education authorities become highly defensive and litigious in response to complaints, further escalating any tension. Often, families must undertake legal action through the courts as a result. This is an extremely expensive and time consuming pathway that is often not an option for many students and families.

In CYDA's experience it is rare for acceptable outcomes or resolutions to occur. Many complaints mechanisms are prohibitively difficult, time consuming and expensive. This can lead to students spending extended periods out of school and significant missed opportunities.

*My son has been in four schools we've had issues of varying degrees at each school. When a parent complains, (schools) close ranks. (The state education authority) say "teachers are appropriately trained" but they are not.*

*(My child's) school is terrible at communicating and transparency and letting me know what's happening in the school that affects my child. Even when I ask I don't get answers. I get the run around. I am still waiting for resolution of an incident from last year.*

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<sup>11</sup> Children and Young People with Disability Australia 2016, *CYDA Education Survey 2016 - National Summary of Results*, Melbourne, viewed 23 November 2016, <https://goo.gl/qamg8R>.

<sup>12</sup> D Cross et al. 2009, *Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study: Executive Summary*, Child Health Promotion Research Centre, Edith Cowan University, Perth, p. xxi.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY

### Direct Experiences

CYDA undertakes an annual survey of the education experiences of students with disability. In the 2016 survey, 4% of respondents identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.<sup>13</sup> Experiences reported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families reflected broader concerns raised within the survey, although specific feedback around cultural considerations was not sought. Some direct experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with disability reported to CYDA include:

*For years (my son) was ignored and put into the 'too hard basket.'*

*(My child's) teachers do not understand (his behaviour support needs) so they assume he is being disrespectful and punish him.*

*(My son) was constantly excluded and bullied...He ended up just sitting at his desk not doing anything for a whole year.*

### Statistics

Available evidence indicates a high prevalence of disability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reports that 15.2% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0 to 14 years have a disability.<sup>14</sup> In comparison, the same survey found that 6.6% of non-Indigenous children have a disability.<sup>15</sup> However, available statistics around the prevalence of disability within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are broadly recognised as being an underrepresentation.<sup>16</sup> Further, there is significant disparities in results between different data sources.

There is also limited available data regarding the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with disability. Available statistics indicate poor educational attainment and employment outcomes. Most recent statistics have found that:\*

- 59.7% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 to 64 years with disability's highest level of education was Year 10 or below. This compares with: 39.4% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people without disability; 45.1% of non-Indigenous people with disability; and 26.6% of all Australian adults aged 15 to 64;<sup>17</sup> and

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\* Please note that most recent ABS data that includes disaggregated statistics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability is from 2012, whereas data regarding the broader population of people with disability is available for 2015. This explains the slight difference in findings between data provided here and that on pages 3-4 of this submission.

<sup>13</sup> Children and Young People with Disability Australia 2016, *CYDA Education Survey 2016 - National Summary of Results*.

<sup>14</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People with a Disability, 2012*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, viewed 23 November 2016, <https://goo.gl/UJEJDD>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> First Peoples Disability Network 2013, *Ten-Point Plan for the Implementation of the NDIS in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities*.

<sup>17</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014, 'Table 4: Persons Aged 15 Years And Over Living in Private Dwellings, Whether has a Disability by Indigenous Status by Level of Highest Educational Attainment (Estimates and Proportions),' *Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People with a Disability, 2012*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

- The labour force participation rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability aged 15 to 64 years is 34.8%. This compares with: 75.3% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people without disability; 53.6% of non-Indigenous people with disability; and 78.3% of all Australian adults aged 15 to 64.<sup>18</sup>

### **Recognition of Disability**

Disability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is often not recognised. This has been highlighted through the work of First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN). FPDN explain that “the vast majority of Aboriginal people with disability do not self-identify as people with disability,” a key factor being that there is no comparable word for disability in traditional languages.<sup>19</sup>

This suggests that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, there is a need to ensure that specific considerations relating to the functional impact of disability are recognised within the education system. It is vital that learning support strategies, including curriculum modifications and adjustments are developed to meet each student’s learning needs.

### **Hearing Loss**

A further important consideration in relation to educational access and outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is hearing loss. Aboriginal children have been found to experience high rates of hearing loss, particularly due to otitis media, a middle ear infection.

While rates vary according to different studies, the 2012–13 *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey* found that “7% of Indigenous children aged 0 to 14 in Australia had ear or hearing problems.”<sup>20</sup> Rates in some communities have been found to be as high as 90%.<sup>21</sup>

Otitis media and associated hearing loss have been found to be a significant barrier to access to education for Aboriginal students, particularly when appropriate support is not provided.<sup>22</sup> It is critical to ensure access to appropriate community, medical and educational support for students impacted by otitis media.

### **Youth Justice Detention**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are significantly overrepresented in youth justice detention centres. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare have reported that 54% of children and young people in detention are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.<sup>23</sup>

Further, available research, although limited, suggests that children and young people with cognitive disability are overrepresented in the criminal justice system.<sup>24</sup> However, any estimates of the proportion of children with disability in youth justice detention may be an underrepresentation.

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<sup>18</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014, ‘Table 5: Persons Aged 15–64 Years Living in Private Dwellings, Whether has a Disability by Indigenous Status by Labour force status (Estimates and Proportions),’ *Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People with a Disability, 2012*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>19</sup> First Peoples Disability Network 2013, *Ten-Point Plan for the Implementation of the NDIS in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities*.

<sup>20</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australian Institute of Family Studies 2014, *Ear Disease in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 2, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016, *Youth Justice in Australia 2014–15*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> K Tyler 2015, ‘Shining a Light into the Shadows: The Hidden Health Needs of Juveniles in Detention,’ *Alternative Law Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 2, p. 102.

CYDA is aware that many children with disability are not recognised due to not having a formal diagnosis or not personally identifying as having a disability. Moreover, at times the knowledge and expertise is not available to identify if a child has disability.

It is critical to ensure access to education for young people in youth justice detention, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people with disability. The importance of education to young people who have contact with the justice system is broadly recognised as critical to providing opportunities and pathways for young people in detention outside of offending.<sup>25</sup>

### **Out of Home Care**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are also overrepresented in out of home care (OOHC) arising from a child protection intervention. In 2015, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were 5.5% of the total population of children aged 0 to 17 years, yet represented 35.6% of all children placed in OOHC.<sup>26</sup>

Children with disability are believed to be overrepresented in statutory OOHC despite there being no reliable national data. Limited available research reflects this high representation. Research undertaken by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, CREATE Foundation and OzChild indicated that the prevalence of disability within the OOHC populations surveyed was 14%, 22.5% and 42% respectively.<sup>27</sup> Even when considering the lowest estimate of 14%, this is almost double the prevalence rate of children and young people with disability aged 0 to 24 in the Australian population (7.7%).<sup>28</sup> Again, the issue of unrecognised disability may be a critical barrier to accurate data.

This available information highlights the need to consider education outcomes and provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC.

### **Key Education Policy Frameworks**

Current policy frameworks that impact provision of education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with disability include:

- The *National Disability Strategy 2010-2020*: The Strategy sets a 10 year reform plan for all Australian governments to address the barriers faced by Australians with disability across a range of life areas. It aims to ensure the rights of people with disability are afforded in Australia and support “improved performance of mainstream services in delivering outcomes for people with disability.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> T Allard et al. 2007, *The Efficacy of Strategies to Reduce Juvenile Offending*, Griffith University, Brisbane.

<sup>26</sup> Australian Institute of Family Studies 2016, *Children in Care*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, viewed 23 November 2016, <https://goo.gl/vb9HWb>.

<sup>27</sup> Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission 2012, *Desperate Measures: The Relinquishment of Children with Disability into State Care in Victoria*, Carlton, p. 7, CREATE Foundation 2013, *Experiencing Out of Home Care in Australia: The Views of Children and Young People*, Brisbane, p. 14, G Mitchell 2013, *Children with Disabilities using Child and Family Welfare Services*, Melbourne, OzChild, South Melbourne, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016, ‘Table 1.1 Persons with Disability, by Age and Sex—2003, 2009, 2012 and 2015, Estimate,’ *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: First Results, 2015*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>29</sup> Council of Australian Governments 2011, *National Disability Strategy 2010-2020*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, p. 9.

One of the policy areas covered by the Strategy is 'learning and skills,' which includes the policy direction to "focus on reducing the disparity in educational outcomes for people with a disability."<sup>30</sup>

- The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy*: A framework that aims to guide coordinated work between the jurisdictions and education sectors to improve education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.<sup>31</sup> It includes four priority areas, which are: school and child readiness; literacy and numeracy; attendance; and transition points including pathways to post school options.<sup>32</sup>
- *Indigenous Advancement Strategy*: A Commonwealth program that funds services, initiatives and activities that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.<sup>33</sup> Funding through the Strategy is provided in five streams, one of which is 'children and schooling.'<sup>34</sup> The aims of this funding stream include improving school attendance and "improving education outcomes."<sup>35</sup>

At present, policy frameworks relating to students with disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students appear to be operating with minimal reference to each other. For example, there are no outcomes in relation to students with disability within the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy*. It is important to ensure that there are appropriate linkages between these and other relevant frameworks so that work to improve educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with disability is well coordinated.

## CONCLUSION

There is currently minimal data and information available regarding the educational outcomes of students with disability, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. However, direct experiences and available evidence indicate that they are extremely poor. It is therefore vital to consider the specific needs and circumstances of these students in this inquiry and broader reform occurring.

It is also critical that education reform impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with disability is informed by direct experiences. This should involve specific consultation with organisations with relevant expertise, including CYDA as the national representative organisation for children and young people with disability and FPDN as the representative organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

<sup>31</sup> Council of Australian Governments Education Council 2015, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Australian Government Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2016, *Indigenous Advancement Strategy*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, viewed 23 November 2016, <https://goo.gl/VdpLPI>.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Australian Government Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2016, *Indigenous Advancement Strategy: Fact Sheet*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, viewed 23 November 2016, <https://goo.gl/MIY5qu>.

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