



Media Statement

30 July 2020

Once again no planning for children and young people with disability during the COVID-19 pandemic

As the second wave of the pandemic hits Victoria hard with 732 new cases today and almost 3,000 in the last week, and is threatening Queensland and New South Wales, Australia's national representative organisation Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) says there has been a complete lack of planning for one of the hardest hit groups whose lives have been thrown into turmoil.

Children and young people with disability, and their families, have experienced significant and widespread impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic so far, and this is set to continue without targeted planning and support.

CYDA's survey data from thousands of families shows a disturbing pattern of discrimination and systemic neglect for children and young people with disability. This includes forcing families in Victoria to make the impossible decision between the health of their child and physically attending school because they don't have enough support at home, and repeated messages to parents in the first wave that their child will be supported in their education after everyone else is sorted out.

One parent told CYDA: *'The school was terrible at disability support and inclusion before the pandemic and have remained uncaring and disinterested during it. They are doing the absolute bare minimum to support my child and others with disability, are not teaching at school or online, no aide time has been offered and there is no support.'*

With the COVID-19 situation so serious in Victoria at the moment, and worrying trends across the country, **CYDA is urging the Australian Government to establish a cross-jurisdictional, cross-sector committee to respond to the needs of children and young people** in this time, with a particular focus on the unique challenges facing children and young people with disability.

This committee needs work on a broader risk-management and preparedness approach from governments, rather than the reactive and patchwork approach we are currently seeing.

There are already a number of cross-disability forums in place, including the Australian Department of Health's Advisory Committee for the COVID-19 Response for People with Disability, however these are not currently scoped to holistically respond to the specific experiences faced by children and young people, including their education needs. Similarly, there is no national forum considering and responding to the needs facing children and young people in general.

The Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment convened an Education and Employment Sector Pandemic Preparedness Committee but this was disbanded in late June despite serious ongoing challenges facing children and young people, including those with disability, in their education and employment.

With so many government departments and agencies involved in the lives of children and young people with disability – including the National Disability Insurance Agency, education, health, child protection, and youth justice – it is critical the new committee contains appropriate representation from government and community stakeholders, and is empowered to make proactive policy and communications decisions.

We need to do better for our children and young people through the second wave as the risks will be unrelenting while we wait for a vaccine or better treatment for COVID-19.

Download CYDA's survey reports here:

[More than isolated: The experience of children and young people with disability and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic, May 2020](#)

[Not even remotely fair: Experiences of students with disability during COVID-19, July 2020](#)

Quotes attributable to Mary Sayers, CEO, Children and Young People with Disability Australia

“Children and young people with disability and their families were let down by the Australian and state and territory governments during the first wave of the pandemic because they and their representative organisations were not adequately involved to plan for, target and tailor information and support appropriately.”

“Our plea to Australian and state and territory governments is, yes focus on aged care, but also remember there are many other cohorts vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19 and beyond, including risks of infection.”

“Because of the disruption students with disability have faced in their education and in other ways during the pandemic, the psychological impacts and trauma they have experienced is likely to be heightened in comparison to others. Around half of children with disability and their families reported a decline in their mental health through CYDA's two recent surveys.”

“In their education 61% of respondents said students with disability had received inadequate support so they could be included in education during remote learning”

“Too much of the pandemic response for children and young people with disability has been operating in siloes. Only with a cross-cutting approach will we ensure children and young people with disability do not continue to experience systemic neglect, prevent haphazard approaches to their education where families have to choose between health and education because schools are not providing sufficient support for remote learning, and address difficulties in securing supports through the NDIS.”

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