



Children and Young People
with Disability Australia

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Parliament of Victoria
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
East Melbourne VIC 3002
via email (paec@parliament.vic.gov.au)

Monday 11 May 2020

Dear Committee members,

Re: The experience of children and young people with disability and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) is pleased to provide this letter to the Committee, highlighting key concerns and issues raised by young people with disability and their families and carers as we navigate the COVID-19 pandemic and associated government responses.

CYDA represents children and young people with disability and their families and carers across Australia, with a large proportion of our members in Victoria. We collected feedback from young people and families of children with disability about their experiences during the coronavirus outbreak throughout March and April 2020, with 698 responses recorded in total. Around two thirds of the responses we received relate to children with disability aged between 7 and 18 years. A summary of the responses is provided as an attachment to this letter.

An overwhelming majority of responses (83 per cent) indicated there has not been enough information targeted to children and young people with disability or their families during this period. While there has been significant public discussion about people who are 'vulnerable' to COVID-19, this has largely focused on older people and there appears to be limited consideration given to children and young people with disability who have underlying conditions or those who are immunocompromised.

This challenge was further compounded as we entered Term 2 in Victoria, with few mentions of students with disability during the extensive public discussions of arrangements for the school term. Students with disability are among the most at-risk for educational neglect and exclusion, especially in a time of crisis. Our members report that little support has been provided for students with disability to learn at home or to have the general curriculum differentiated to their needs, and also report a lack of reasonable adjustments and difficulties maintaining connections with their usual teachers, learning support staff and peers.

Access to inclusive education – as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in Article 24 and General Comment 4 – and access to appropriate and sufficient supports for students with disability at schools are hard won at the best of times. The Disability Royal Commission highlighted this by holding its first public hearings on the topic of



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inclusive education in late 2019. CYDA is concerned that the educational outcomes for students with disability will be significantly affected by the lack of support provided during the coronavirus period, and that this will have broader impacts on the overall wellbeing of young people and their families now and as we continue along the 'road out.'

All responses to the COVID-19 pandemic must be designed to avoid creating further educational disadvantage, social disconnection and inequality. Already we have seen one in five responses to our survey reporting a decline in mental health and wellbeing in the household through the pandemic period (either the respondent themselves or their child with a disability, or both).

Further information to support the delivery of inclusive education in a time of crisis is available in a recent paper published by the Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education, which is chaired and co-convened by CYDA. This paper is [available online](#) and also provided as an attachment.

Additionally, CYDA has recently opened a new survey, focusing on the educational experiences of children and young people with disability before and during the coronavirus outbreak. We look forward to providing data from this survey to support the Committee's inquiry in due course.

We will provide more information to the Committee in the course of its important inquiry. We are happy to discuss our comments in more detail or provide additional information if this would be helpful. Please feel free to contact me on 03 9417 1025 or marysayers@cyda.org.au.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Sayers
Chief Executive Officer
Children and Young People with Disability Australia