Making a Start
Building support for your child and family
This booklet provides information for families who have very young children (0 to pre-school) who may have a developmental delay or disability. It aims to help you to understand what support is available for your child and family, and how to make informed choices that are right for you. The booklet has been designed with an interactive workbook component for families to use individually or together with their ECI professional.
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Seeking help for your child

Every family wants their child to have the best life possible – to be healthy, happy, have friends and to make their own way when they become adults.

When you first learn that your child has a disability or developmental delay you may feel a mix of emotions and you may have many questions. It can be overwhelming! You may be feeling unsure about what your child needs and how to provide for your child. Many families find it difficult at first, to come to terms with the unexpected journey they find themselves travelling together.

This is a time to celebrate being a parent and to enjoy your child. Every child is unique. With some support and information, knowing how to support your child’s development will become clearer.

I am worried about my child’s development... What should I do?

There are many trusted professionals who can assist you in finding the support and information you need for your family. Some or all of these professionals may be useful to consult in the early days when you first have concerns about your child’s development or receive a diagnosis:

- Your local Maternal and Child Health Nurse – to understand your child’s developmental milestones.
- Your Early Childhood Education & Care Teacher, for example Kindergarten Teacher, – to discuss their observations of your child’s learning and development.
- A General Practitioner – to assist with everyday health concerns, links to specialists and the completion of documents.
- A Paediatrician – to provide assessment, links to further specialists and ongoing care for your child until they are an adult.
"Looking back at that time, it was often confusing and uncertain as we were in a state of flux. My partner and I were supports for each other and tended to look inwards to our little family circle. This was not sustainable and we were often on different pages emotionally. I found that researching and reading case studies about other families as well as information from bodies like Carers Victoria and The Association for Children with a Disability the most valuable resources in the early stages. I learned not to be too hard on myself too."

If you are seeking confirmation of your concern

- Seek the advice of your General Practitioner or Paediatrician, to find a specialist who can make an assessment of your child.
- Keep a record of your child’s progress, the behaviours you are concerned about and the situations in which they arise. Prepare your list of observations and questions. This will help you to discuss your concerns with specialists when the time comes. It may help to start a folder of assessments, letters and information relating to your concerns. Various specialists may request copies of past developmental or health assessments.
- Seek opinions (or second opinions) from another specialist – e.g. Maternal and Child Health Nurse, General Practitioner, Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher at Childcare or Kindergarten, Speech Pathologist, Paediatrician etc.

If you are seeking a diagnosis

- Check which services makes the assessment your child needs. Often a Paediatrician can tell you. There may be public health options, or private specialists to assist. You are entitled to ask what options may be available to you and which are most accessible or affordable.
- Are all your child’s maternal and child health checks up to date? Has your child had a hearing or sight check? If there is concern about developmental delay/disability then, for young children, these checks are free. They can be organised by your General Practitioner.
- Early childhood intervention can start before diagnosis. You don’t need to wait for a diagnosis to begin the process towards accessing early childhood intervention for your child.

What are your specific concerns regarding your child’s developmental milestones? List your observations.

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What questions would you like to ask any of the professionals mentioned above?

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I have been told my child has a developmental delay or disability and needs early childhood intervention (ECI).

What is Early Childhood Intervention?

The early childhood years are as important for children with disabilities and developmental delays as they are for all children. Future development is based on the child’s learning during this period. This is also when families learn how to support and nurture their child, how to meet their child’s needs and how to adapt positively to having a child with a disability or a developmental delay. To achieve these goals, families may need early childhood intervention (ECI).

ECI is the process of providing a range of supports and services that promote development, wellbeing and participation in the community for young children with developmental delays or disabilities and their families.

The role of ECI support is to assist you as a parent/carer to:

- help your child develop skills and abilities to participate in and enjoy daily life,
- understand the kinds of experiences which can assist your child’s growth and development and what you can do to help, and
- enjoy your child and your family.

The supports that are best for your child and family will be based on your needs, helping you to create the experiences and opportunities that are meaningful for you and your child, based on their existing strengths and interests. They aim to help you to be confident, aware and strong, and assist your role as your child’s first teacher in life.

Children learn most in everyday situations with familiar people. Early intervention is about encouraging and supporting everyday learning and so will naturally build on opportunities for learning and development already being provided at home and through services such child care and kindergarten.

**ECI CAN BE:** therapy, outreach, information, key worker, sibling support, linking to services, community health, parent education programs, transition to school or kindergarten, parent support, flexible support packages, planning and service coordination, education and developmental programs, Kindergarten Inclusion Support packages, support to access and participate in kindergarten and child care services.

**ECI CAN BE DELIVERED BY:** Community Health, Government, Private Therapists, Non Government Organisations.
"In early intervention we are learning how to celebrate the things Alice can do and to focus on her strengths."

"I was surprised to find that my ECI service can also help my child without the disability. I am learning we need to think about the whole family’s health and wellbeing."

Sofia attends an early intervention service where our key worker helps us to set goals and coordinate therapies and programs for Sofia and the family. For example:

• Our key worker supports Sofia and her teachers to enable a successful kindergarten experience.

• As parents we undertake courses such as the Hanen Program ‘It Takes Two to Talk’ and ‘Early Goals’.

• Sofia’s sister Gabriella attends the sibling group where she has fun, makes new friends and can share her experiences.

We also access many other supports outside our ECI service which help our family:

• We are completing the Signposts for Building Better Behaviour program for parents.

• I attend a Mytime program, a support group where I can catch up with other parents.

• We also attend our local community health centre where Sofia sees the dentist and dietician.
A family approach

You and your family are your child’s first teachers and know your child best. Whether you plan to or not, everything you do is supporting your child’s development and participation in activities. Your child learns through your sensitive and thoughtful care, your interest in their interests, the supports and limits you set and from their relationships with other family members such as brothers and sisters. The best support for your child will become a natural part of what you do every day. ECI will assist you by working with your family’s strengths and supporting you with the tasks of daily life affecting your child.

Your daily family routines are great assets. They are great times for your child to practice skills, with your families’ support. So work with your ECI professional to build the activities and strategies that will support your child’s progress into your routines. It should feel part of what you would want to be doing anyway, not an add-on or a burden.

ECI should fit with the rest of your daily life. All children need time to be familiar with people, places and activities in order to learn. Children with challenges of any type need more time to learn and to develop. Think about how much relaxed time you and your child are having. Their play interests are important for their learning. If activities add extra pressure, are they worth it? It’s important to balance long term and short term family needs.

What do you enjoy most about being a parent?

What activities do you like to participate in as a family?

How does your child currently participate in and enjoy daily life?
How do I get early childhood intervention? Where should I go for help?

Many families have found early childhood intervention information and support helpful as part of the early care for their child. Some families access support once they have a diagnosis. Other families start accessing the support as soon as developmental milestones show that extra help may be needed. It’s never too early to start ECI.

Pathways to early childhood intervention

There are many paths to access early childhood intervention for each individual child and family. Some of these are local supports and services open to all families within the community.

You may like to consider the following services either instead of or to complement the services you are already receiving:

State Funded Early Childhood Intervention
Families can access ECI with Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS) which are funded by the Victorian Government’s Department of Education & Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and are delivered by government and non-government specialist teams and agencies with minimal or no cost to families.

To access assistance and services contact DEECD ECIS Central Intake in your area who will be able to talk you through the process and eligibility criteria for accessing early childhood intervention services.

Once you have established your child’s eligibility, if you wish, you can arrange to visit some of these ECIS agencies to select one that best suits your child’s and family’s needs. Central Intake will then make a referral to that ECIS agency.

If another service has a space first, you can elect to take what is on offer and keep your initial preference on record for when a place there becomes available.

"When Zoe was a baby we noticed she couldn’t do certain things like lift her arms above her head and crawl when other babies were starting to. I would go to our mothers group and be the only one keeping Zoe on a bed without protection whilst all the other babies were crawling everywhere. At her 12 month check, the maternal health nurse was concerned and referred me to physiotherapist at Sunshine Hospital where she also received occupational and speech therapy for 2 years before being diagnosed."
Community Health Services

Many Community Health Services offer early intervention services through multi-discipline child health teams. These teams work with families where children’s delays are mild to moderate. Locally teams vary; your Community Health Service may be able to provide you with a range of coordinated services such as speech therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy and assistance with dietary concerns or developing social, emotional or behaviour skills. Additional low cost services for children and adults in your family are also located in Community Health, for example dental, counselling and parenting services. Priority is given to those with special needs, low income and chronic health conditions. Eligibility criteria and small fees apply for most services.


Early Childhood Education and Care Services

Early Childhood Education and Care Services include childcare, occasional care, family day care, playgroups and kindergarten. These services are designed to provide care, socialisation experiences and educational opportunities for children from birth to school age. Additional assistance is available to help some children access and participate in these services through:

- **Kindergarten Inclusion Support** packages which in most cases employ additional assistants for a percentage of time a child attends kindergarten. These assistants support the overall functioning of kindergartens enabling them to support all children, including children with developmental delays/disabilities.

- **Preschool Field Officers** also support teachers to assist children in kindergarten and provide advice to families immediately prior to and during the kindergarten year/s.

- **Inclusion Support Agencies** help support childcare, family day care and out of school hours’ care services that may require extra support to include children with additional needs. Supports must be requested by the children’s service staff.

- **Supported Playgroups** aim to engage families by providing quality play opportunities for children at a critical time in their development.
  www.playgroup.org.au/Programs/

ECIS Flexible Support Packages

ECIS Flexible Support Packages are available for families who have children eligible for ECIS. The packages are specifically designed to provide individualised support to address a specific need(s) unable to be fully met by ECIS and are to be used within a specific time frame.


Private Therapists

While most ECI professionals work as part of a diversely qualified team, some also work as sole therapists. These ECI professionals are often accessed through Community Health, a GP Management Plan, the Helping Children with Autism or the Better Start programs, if your child is eligible. Please note, your child can receive ECI with an agency funded through DEECD at the same time as accessing a GP Management Plan or the Helping Children with Autism or Better Start programs.

- Through the GP Management Plan, your child could access Medicare benefits to cover allied health services to help manage their condition. Speak to your General Practitioner about this program. It would entitle you to a significant discount from the cost of several sessions each year. Some ECI professionals bulk bill the remaining portion.

- If your child has an eligible diagnosis, Helping Children with Autism or Better Start programs may provide significant funding for your child to access therapies such as Speech Therapy, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy or Psychology, etc. In some instances the funding for these programs is coordinated by a State funded ECI Service.

  Contact Carers Victoria on 1800 242 636 for more information about programs specific to your child.

Which of the above programs or services could possibly help your family at this time?

TIP: When searching on the internet try using the link provided in the booklet which in most cases directs you to the service’s home page. To find out more specific information about a program use the ‘search’ field on the website’s home page to find a resource more quickly.

For example once on DEECD’s website enter ‘kindergarten inclusion support’ in the ‘search field’.

Contact Carers Victoria on 1800 242 636 for more information about programs specific to your child.
How do I choose an ECI Service?

When deciding if the early childhood intervention service is suitable for your child and your family, the following questions could be helpful to ask:

- What are your service’s values and philosophies around supporting children with disabilities and developmental delays?
- How would the services offered by your organisation support my child?
- How would your service work in partnership with our family?
- Can parents or other family members be involved with the service?
- Are there any fees charged for your services?
- How long will our family have to wait before accessing your services?
- In the meantime, are you able to suggest other supports we may be able to access for our child?
- What qualifications do the staff have?
- How do the professionals at your service work together to coordinate support for my child and our family?
- How does your service encourage positive behaviour in children?
- Do you have material about your service I could take home with me?

Like choosing a school for your child, you may like to talk to other families for information and to find out about their experiences when selecting an ECI service. Contact your disability specific organisation (for example Down Syndrome Association of Victoria), regional parent support coordinator or Carers Victoria who can put you in touch with families and support groups in your area. Parent support workers at the Association for Children with a Disability are another valuable source of information and support.

For a list of disability specific links and groups please visit Association for Children with a Disability’s web page. www.acd.org.au

What are your family’s priorities when choosing an ECI service?

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________
"It was important for our family that Ben could receive early intervention as part of his kindergarten program. We needed to choose a service that had the capacity to make visits to the kindergarten to support Ben and his teacher."

"We chose our early intervention service because it was local to us and when we first visited, the staff were friendly and encouraging towards our daughter. We also loved that the centre offered Emily an integrated kindergarten experience where she could play and learn alongside her peers."

Will I have to wait?
What can I do in the meantime?

Sometimes you may wait between appointments, wait for a diagnosis or for early intervention to commence. There are things you can do to ensure support is as prompt as possible.

Having your child participate as much as possible in the usual activities of family and community life is valuable. Striking a balance can be hard at times, but it’s useful to try and mix normal family activities with doing things to help, such as therapies. You don’t have to try every therapy or support at once – it helps if this fits with family life. A good strategy is also to encourage your child’s interests as a way for them to practice skills in areas of concern; for example singing a child’s favourite nursery rhymes to help their speech development or having your child help with the cooking when trying to introduce a new food.

What are your child’s interests at this stage in life?

Think of three ideas, even small ones, you might be able to start immediately to help your child:
What happens when I start ECI?

Working with ECI Professionals

ECI professionals are qualified in specialist areas such as early special education, health, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, psychology and speech pathology.

ECI professionals work from a child and family centred approach where an equal partnership is created between parents and ECI professionals to help each family build on its strengths and develop new skills.

In state funded ECIS, as much as possible you will work with one key worker who supports your family, to reduce the need for you to tell your story over and over. Your key worker will assist you to identify which therapies and supports may be helpful to assist your child to learn and develop. They will communicate your child’s needs to other professionals who can provide advice or work directly with your child when necessary.

Your ECI professional will be someone you trust, who is skilled and wants to work with you to learn what works for you and your family. They will help you to think about what they can do and what is possible for you and other family members to do to help your child.

It is important to work with an ECI professional you feel comfortable with. Some ECI Professionals will assist you with a wide range of activities such as linking into other services, setting goals for your child and family and establishing and refining routines. Home, childcare or kindergarten-based sessions are especially valuable for linking therapy strategies to your child’s needs in daily life. It is useful to check that your therapist or service can offer sessions in different settings.

Sometimes ECI professionals may have experience with particular developmental concerns - it can be worth asking if they have experience with children with similar needs to your own child. You may find that the organisation representing your child’s disability or delay has information about recommended specialists. This can be especially useful if your child has a rare condition or need.

When working with ECI professionals it’s good to trust your instincts. If necessary ask a lot of questions. Communicate your needs clearly. If you haven’t experienced the support you’d hoped for and the approach doesn’t feel right for your family, you can always change to a different ECI professional, key worker and service.

“Jacquie was so much more than my key worker. She was my confidante, my sounding board, my teacher. Jacquie taught me how to teach my child.”
Setting goals

Setting goals is a clear way to work together with ECI professionals to decide what you want to achieve for your child and family. It helps to talk about goals you have for your child right now, with an eye to future needs.

It can sometimes be difficult to prioritise what is most important – is it movement and mobility, or communication? Perhaps behaviour is an area of concern? Every family will have a different perspective.

Be clear about what is actually happening in your family, and what is important to you so that your ECI professional can help you choose what is most valuable to work on right now. ECI professionals who work closely with families will have heard many similar challenges before, so it’s helpful to be open about your difficulties, as well as your strengths. Some people may feel a little embarrassed, but you may be surprised that other families have discussed similar issues before.

When deciding on goals, think about what your child can do now and consider:

• “What would make a difference to my child’s life and to our family experience right now?
• “What will help my child take their part in our family and community more easily?”

The answers to these questions should help you set priorities and choose where to start. Your goals may focus on:

• your life and your family experience
• your child’s developmental needs
• your child’s needs balanced with other children / the rest of the family.

In planning the support you would like, think about what will benefit your child and family. Take time to create a plan that acknowledges the pattern and balance of family life for all your family members – considering everyone’s needs.

What skills would you like to see your child learn?

How could you and your child be supported to enable your child to participate in and enjoy daily life?

What additional supports might the other members of your family need at this time?

What strengths do you have as a parent to draw upon when raising your family?

Are there additional skills you would like to develop?
"In the early days of Jacobo's diagnosis, working with Nghi was really important as it was such a dark time for me in my journey as a mum. I found it really difficult to know how to communicate with Jacobo. Nghi was able to give me perspective. She showed me that Jacobo was still my perfect little boy."

"So often we felt confused. We weren't able to predict the path we were going on with our son. Having Trudy there to guide us really helped. In areas where we didn't have any idea of what to do, like enrolling Caleb in kindergarten. Trudy also helped us pave the way."
Using early opportunities found in everyday life

Children learn best through play and when they are relaxed and having fun, and relate best to their family and friends in familiar places. ECI professionals can't take your family's place as the most influential people in your child's life. ECI sessions are only for very short periods, and a good ECI professional will help you learn how to make a difference at home. You are with your child more of the time than anyone else - so you are their best support.

Babies and young children grow and develop through the important everyday aspects of life. Your can support them to:

- have the best health possible
- feel secure with routines including sleeping, eating/drinking, toileting
- be loved and share warm, happy times
- be understood and respond to through communicating with them
- have varied experiences that are enjoyable, engaging and not overwhelming
- have time to try things out through play and to be supported
- have a widening circle of familiar people and friends.

How do I know if I am getting a good ECI service?

The best ECI will help you develop the confidence, knowledge and skills needed to support the needs of your child and family. It will help everyone around your child to promote their development and ability to participate in family and community life. Ask yourself, “Is my child progressing?”, “Is ECI helping me to help my child?” “Is my child able to join in the same activities as other children of about the same age?”

Checklist - Are you on the right track?

How will you know if you are on the right track? Consider the following statements:

- Our ECI professional is knowledgeable about children’s development, disabilities and family life with children a bit like mine.
- Our ECI professional makes us feel like we are part of a team, working together for the benefit of our child and our family.
- Our ECI professional shares his/her knowledge/understanding/skills with us and the others in my family. They are upfront with us about different approaches to evidence based supports and we discuss any concerns.
- Our ECI professional offers choices, respects our decisions and encourages us to stay with our choices long enough to try them out properly.
- Our ECI professional makes us feel comfortable, respected, and able to be frank and ask the questions we want.
- Our ECI professional sees my child as a child first. They always respect and think about my child’s interests, preferences, reactions and opinions in whatever they are discussing with us.
- Our ECI professional teaches us how to link therapy strategies into my child’s routines at home, childcare or kindergarten.
- Our ECI professional cares about and remembers our family and that we are a whole family unit.
- Our ECI professional always gives me enough time to answer the questions I have. They listen carefully to me and learn from me.
- Our ECI professional links our family into other services where appropriate.
- Our ECI sessions are enjoyable and productive.
- Our ECI professional helps us set goals we really care about and that are achievable.

"Hadas loved visiting our speech therapist Lauren at the local Community Health Service. Lauren artfully disguised the therapy in games. Hadas felt like she had her own special playmate."
Where can I find support for my family?

Taking Care of Yourself

Your own wellbeing is important. The emotions of this early period can be hard, and can be hard on relationships. Sometimes sadness can start unexpectedly. What you are feeling is real, and it can take time to feel okay again – everyone’s experience is different and valid. Let friends know it’s helpful just to have them listen. They don’t have to offer solutions. Sometimes family members aren’t sure what to say and they may be experiencing sadness too.

Try to find a balance between active effort and taking breaks. Find sources of good information and support that work for you. Parent Support Workers at the Association for Children with a Disability can offer useful information over the phone and have excellent printed resources to help you find your way through disability and support services. There are also trained counsellors to help – contact Carers Victoria, or your General Practitioner for assistance, or the organisation specific to your child’s condition. They may link you to a support group or a counsellor in your area. Sometimes it helps to talk to someone who understands.

Make sure you have some time for yourself – for exercise, the gym, or being creative or just having a coffee with friends. Spending time on activities that help you feel good and that you enjoyed before parenthood, gives you greater energy and happiness in your life, and in turn, in your role as a parent.

When taking some time for yourself what activities do you enjoy?

"Accessing support is essential to keep going and keep well. I have learnt some of that the hard way! Now I take up any opportunities I can for respite, attending social support groups like MyTime and counselling to deal with stress and the grief of working through the complex issues of having a child with a disability. I take up opportunities when friends offer me support and don’t pretend that I am superwoman and can do it all myself."
Finding support

Family, friends and neighbours are often your main source of support in the longer term. However, in the beginning, sometimes you may feel you are on your own. Initially, some people in your life may deny there is a concern with your child; or may give too much well meaning advice or too many suggestions. Others may just not be able to provide the support you desire. It’s important to trust your instincts as a parent and let that be your guide. It can feel deeply frustrating and disappointing not to have your concerns heard. However, trust what you see and feel, and keep trying to find answers.

It’s okay to ask for help. Think about the types of practical support you would like to receive. Some parents recognise they would like help with filling in countless medical forms – even if just for moral support - perhaps a friend could assist with this. Other families identify their child has specific medical needs requiring many appointments - a relative or friend could assist with other children on those days, or provide company during appointments. It can increase their understanding of your family needs, and bring you closer.

You may like to consider using respite support services which provide short-term breaks for carers of people with a disability, while providing a positive experience for the person with a disability either in their own home or away from home. Short term breaks can be overnight, in-home, with another family or flexible support. Contact Carers Victoria for more information about your respite options.

Many families feel that being in touch with others in similar circumstances helps them to understand what’s typical and to ‘normalise’ their experiences. Family networks of people with children who have similar difficulties, provide opportunities to share knowledge and wisdom and are some of the best emotional support possible. Early intervention can help you to find like minded people in related circumstances to share the journey with you. Siblings also benefit from the opportunity to join networks of others in similar circumstances.

If you have other children, or work, or other responsibilities, there can be a lot of activities to juggle! Great supports improve your quality of life. Having a child with a disability alters many families’ priorities. Over time you will find a balance that you can work with, that feels right for you.

Contact Carers Victoria on 1800 242 636 for more information.

What avenues for support do you have or could you explore further?

"I found the MyTime program such a lifeline in the beginning of our journey, both before diagnosis and after. It was such a relief to listen to other parents going through similar circumstances, it made you feel somewhat normal to share the experiences of the challenges involved in parenting a special needs child. Each week I would look forward to the meetings and come away uplifted and able to get through another week. As well as informative sessions on specific related subjects, I gleaned plenty of information ‘road tested’ by other parents by attending MyTime too. It saved reinventing the wheel."
Supporting siblings

Many children with a developmental delay or disability have a sibling in their family; a brother or sister. This relationship can provide a great source of fun, support and learning. Often siblings have very special roles in each other’s lives, and as disability impacts on every member of the family in different ways, siblings need to be remembered as an important part of this experience. After all, the sibling of a person with a disability may have the longest relationship with them over their whole lives, which outlasts any other relationship in the family.

A sibling’s understandings and experiences are very different to that of other members of the family and they have their own unique set of challenges to meet and joys to celebrate. Siblings certainly learn particular skills and gain in many ways from their experiences. Siblings need support too and providing this support is crucial for the sibling’s health as well as the whole family’s wellbeing. At different ages siblings will have different understandings however, at all ages siblings may need additional help to express their feelings and thoughts, establish positive bonds with their brothers and sisters, develop coping strategies to create resilience, receive acknowledgement from parents and feel the importance of their own unique identity and specialness within the family.

Sibling supports can be introduced at a young age, as a proactive approach, rather than when concerns arise. You may support siblings by building their strengths, capacities and enhancing coping skills. Give them chances to pursue their own activities and interests. Provide 1:1 time with each parent, as well as time alone with both parents. Ensure they feel included in information, meetings and decisions, and help them meet others in similar situations.

Supports can include: sibling groups, age appropriate information, health services, liaising with their teachers and school, 1:1, mentor or counselling support or young carer services.

For more information contact Siblings Australia [www.siblingsaustralia.org.au](http://www.siblingsaustralia.org.au), or The Association for Children with a Disability, who have produced a free booklet about siblings called *Growing Together*, [www.acd.org.au/siblings](http://www.acd.org.au/siblings). Contact Carers Victoria, [www.carersvictoria.org.au](http://www.carersvictoria.org.au) or your disability specific organisation to find out more about support groups and supports for siblings in your area, or to simply discuss your family’s concerns about sibling needs.
Key contacts for support

The suggested list of key contacts is not an all inclusive list. Some contacts have also already been listed within the booklet. Please note some organisations may direct you to other services that are best suited to assist your family at this time.

Victorian State Support

- **Carers Victoria** supports caring families by providing information, advice, carer counselling and education workshops.  
  www.carersvictoria.org.au

- **ECIA-VIC** is the peak body for early childhood intervention in Victoria. ECIA's work assists children with developmental delays or disabilities, their families, and the networks that support them including ECI professionals.  
  www.eciavic.org.au

- **Association for Children with a Disability** provides information, support and advocacy for children with a disability and their families, in Victoria.  
  www.acd.org.au

- **Regional Parenting Services** provide families with the opportunity to participate in local, effective and relevant parenting programs that focus on key transition points in the lives of children and families.  

- **Regional Parent Support Coordinators** can also refer families to other parenting programs and services such as Family Intervention Services and Early Parenting Services and the Strengthening Parent Support Program. To locate a Regional Parent Support Coordinator refer to the Association for Children with a Disability’s regional quick guides which can be found at www.acd.org.au.

- **Statewide Equipment Program**. The Victorian Statewide equipment program provides people with a permanent or long-term disability with subsidised aids and equipment to enhance independence in their home, facilitate community participation and support families and carers in their role. For more information please contact Carers Victoria on 1800 242 636.

Local Supports

Your local council is a great place to start to access local services. Most councils have a Community and/or Disability Services Directory which puts you in touch with a range of services to assist you and your family. Some of these are run by council itself, such as neighbourhood houses and respite care services, and others are coordinated by separate disability services in the region. To find your local council visit the Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development website at:  

Australian Commonwealth Support

- **Department of Human Services**. You may be eligible for a Carer’s Allowance, Carer Payment and/ or a Health Care Card for your child, because of their additional medical or therapy needs. Contact the Department of Human Services for further information.  
  www.humanservices.gov.au

- **Department of Social Services** helps to support people with disabilities and their parents and carers through programs and services, benefits and payments, as well as the provision of funding and grants to organisations delivering services.  
  www.dss.gov.au

- **The MyTime program** provides facilitated peer support for mums, dads, grandparents and anyone caring for children with a disability, developmental delay or chronic medical condition.  
  www.mytime.net.au
What is the National Disability Insurance Scheme and when will it come to my area?

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is a new support system for all Australians with a disability. Currently launch sites are operating in a select number of locations expanding to the whole of Australia in coming years.

You can find out more about NDIS at www.disabilitycareaustralia.gov.au or by calling them on 1800 800 110.

For people living in the Geelong area (Barwon Region), the NDIS is providing support for people under 65 years from July 2013 onwards. For other locations across Victoria, the NDIS will begin rolling out to new locations from July 2016. It will be available across Australia by July 2019.
Key resources

- **Helping You and Your Family**: Information, support and advocacy for parents and siblings of children with a disability in Victoria.

  *Helping You and Your Family* is an information booklet for families in the early years who have a child with any type of disability or developmental delay. Topics include: Diagnosis, Emotions, Family and Friends, Siblings, Looking After Yourself, Your Support Network, Working Together, The information maze, Through the maze, Children with autism, Parent support, and an easy reference list of phone numbers and websites. Copies of Helping You and Your Family are available free to families.


- **The Position Statement on the Inclusion of Children with a Disability in Early Childhood Education and Care** can assist everyone in early childhood education and care services, in early childhood intervention and other support professionals to move closer to fully including children with a disability and to achieving high quality outcomes for all children. It is also expected the statement will provide a framework for the development and implementation of policy and programs designed for all young children. It, most importantly, encourages strong collaborative partnerships between children, families, early childhood educators and support professionals as a cornerstone to achieving high quality inclusion.

  [www.eciavic.org.au](http://www.eciavic.org.au)
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(PO Box 2204, Footscray, VIC 3011
Phone: (03) 9396 9500  Carer Advisory Line: 1800 242 636
www.carersvictoria.org.au

Early Childhood Intervention Australia (Victorian Chapter)
Suite 2, 98 Morang Road, Hawthorn, VIC 3122
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