

NDIS Coronavirus (COVID-19) Information pack

**Early Childhood– Children
younger than 7**

August 2021

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Introduction

This pack is designed to help parents and carers of children younger than 7, get the most out of their NDIS plan during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

We understand there is a lot of information, and some changes to the way the NDIS is being delivered during the pandemic, so we have created information packs like this one on specific topics.

We know that children's routines have been impacted by COVID-19 – by potentially not attending early childhood education and care programs, not being able to attend face to face early childhood intervention sessions, not attending school or pre-school and not being able to visit family and friends. All of these situations may have an impact on your child's wellbeing and development.

You may want to think about your child's NDIS Plan and consider alternative ways to get the supports you need to help your child achieve their goals. You can purchase supports you need in a variety of different ways. Maybe your weekly one hour early childhood intervention session no longer meet your needs and you would like to check in with your provider for a shorter session twice a week.

Your provider may offer new programs and supports that you may be interested in and this is something you can discuss with them. There are also a wide range of other early childhood activities and programs now available on line and on free to air TV that you can explore with your child. Although early childhood intervention may look different at the moment, progress towards your child's Plan goals will still be able to continue.

We've made some changes to ensure NDIS participants continue to get the services and supports they need. Families of children with an NDIS plan can:

- use their existing funding to purchase low cost Assistive Technology like smart devices
- have your plan review meeting over the phone
- be assured that we will regularly check in with you to ensure your child's plan continues to meet to meet your (and their needs). If we find your child's plan isn't meeting their needs, we will set up a plan review.
- request additional disability-related supports through a change of circumstances plan review if your child's needs have changed.

In order to reach NDIS participants, their families and carers throughout the pandemic, please share the information and resources in this pack with parents and families.

We are regularly updating the NDIS website with information for participants, and will be complementing this by sharing information packs such as this on specific topics.

You can support our communications throughout the pandemic by using the following links to the NDIS website:

- [NDIS Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) information and support](#)

The following guidelines also provide information on supports that the NDIS may fund:

- [Reasonable and necessary supports guidelines](#)
- [Would we fund it guidelines](#)

Please let us know which topics you would like information on in the future as well as provide any other feedback you have to communications@ndis.gov.au.

The planning process

First planning meeting

If you are waiting on your child's first planning meeting, the meeting can still be held over the phone.

You can talk to your early childhood partner about ways you can share information about your child's development.

Plan review

We will call you to discuss your child's current support needs, and if required undertake a plan review to discuss and consider any changes. Plan reviews are being conducted over the phone. You can provide us with important information and evidence by email.

Twelve months is the usual plan duration recommended for children younger than 7, due to their changing developmental needs. However, a plan duration can be up to 24 months, depending on the child and family circumstances

If we have been unable to undertake a plan review, on the day your child's current plan ends, it will be automatically extended to make sure you have the funding you need.

Changing your plan

Your capacity building budget is flexible, and you can change the way you use your plan to meet your child's needs. We encourage you to talk to your provider about the way you can use the supports within your current plan.

Your early childhood partner can help you consider different ways to use your funded supports and access mainstream services. If you don't know how to contact your early childhood partner, you can look on your child's plan under My NDIS Contact.

To learn more about the different types of plan reviews agency initiated or participant requested, check out [Our Guideline – Plan Reviews](#) and [Our Guideline – Reviewing our Decisions](#).

Using your supports

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the NDIA is encouraging parents and carers to use their child's supports flexibly.

Can your service provider deliver by telehealth / tele-practice?

Some providers are using tele-practice or telehealth to deliver early childhood intervention supports.

Tele-practice or telehealth can include:

- videoconferencing
- emails
- text messages
- telephone calls
- group chats
- sending video or photos.

Tele-practice or telehealth encourages the use of capacity building practices, like coaching, which are best practice approaches. Working with the provider, parents and carers can problem solve together, and find solutions that are practical and effective in a child's everyday routine.

It's important that you talk to your provider about the tele-practice and telehealth solutions that will best support your child.

Supports that can't be delivered by telehealth

Specialised supports

Some specialised therapy supports may need to be completed in person (such as a wheelchair fitting or orthotics prescription). To maintain physical distancing, this should only be in cases where it is an immediate priority.

In home supports

Some families may have carers coming into their homes to support children with complex support needs. These essential supports will most likely need to continue.

If your support workers cannot work with you, your provider should be in touch with you to organise a replacement worker or carer to help you. It's important that you discuss what your essential needs are with your provider.

Wherever possible, we encourage you to maintain physical distancing and good hygiene practices and to follow the advice of the [Department of Health](#).

Low cost Assistive Technology

Smart devices

To help participants continue to receive their NDIS funded supports and services during periods when the community is in lock down, the NDIA has introduced a new low cost Assistive Technology (AT) policy for items under \$1500.

COVID-19 has changed the way some supports are delivered, with technology enabling support continuity through telehealth, video conferencing and other technologies.

In recognition of this, the flexible approach to purchasing low cost AT will continue and be monitored as participants and providers adapt to COVID normal.

This will allow participants to use their existing NDIS funding to buy low cost AT items, such as smart devices. Participants can purchase an item if:

- it will maintain funded NDIS supports like a program, therapy or requirement (for example, early childhood intervention via tele-practice or telehealth)
- your provider has confirmed in writing the device is necessary to continue supports and services while maintaining physical distancing requirements
- it is the lowest specification that will maintain funded supports, and
- they do not already have the item, another suitable item or access to the item, and
- the item has not been funded by another service system (such as education), and
- the item or circumstances are not specifically excluded.

This new approach acknowledges many face to face services are being suspended due to physical distancing regulations, and capacity building supports and interpreting services which cannot be delivered face to face are being delivered online.

How do I purchase a smart device?

Your provider will help you to purchase the right equipment to connect with them via tele-practice.

We encourage you to work with your provider to discuss options and find solutions that are practical and effective to meet your family's needs.

You can only purchase a smart device if you have funds available in your plan. Internet costs including data continue to be a personal expense.

NDIS funding cannot be used for:

- Any item that does not relate to the participant's disability or that doesn't help to maintain NDIS funded supports and services.
- Devices with specifications beyond the minimum needed.
- Smart phones or tablets with 3G, 4G or 5G mobile connections (though you can pay from your own money to upgrade from a wifi model to a mobile capable model).
- Multiple devices for the same participant.

- Utility costs (internet connection and data) as these are considered ordinary living costs.
- Applications (apps) or software. Apps which have been specified and approved in a plan can be paid for with NDIS funding
- Additional hardware or accessories, other than standard protective cases.
- Purchase of items when rental options may be appropriate.
- Additional hardware and accessories may be purchased if they relate to using the device because of the participant's disability, such as wheelchair mounting for a person with limited grip.

Replacements for loss or damage will generally follow the existing AT replacement policy

Replacement of items would generally only apply where the existing device is no longer suitable to meet the participant's needs at that time. It does not include upgrade because a new model or version is released.

Play equipment and physical therapy equipment

The NDIS does not fund play equipment. You can see what we do fund on our [website](#).

If your child normally receives physical therapy, we encourage you to talk to your provider about how to build practice and strategies into your child's everyday routines. This may include developing supports and strategies children can do at home or child care, or borrowing equipment and keeping in touch over the phone.

Parents and carers should also talk to their child's provider about everyday activities they can do with their child, using items available at home and including new activities in everyday play.

Participants can now use their existing NDIS funding to purchase an item if:

- it will maintain funded NDIS supports like a program, therapy or requirement (for example physiotherapy or Auslan interpreting provided via video conferencing), and
- the provider of supports has confirmed in writing the device is necessary to continue supports and services while maintaining physical distancing requirements, and
- it is the lowest specification that will maintain funded supports, and
- they do not already have the item, another suitable item or access to the item, and
- the item has not been funded by another service system (such as education), and
- the item or circumstances are not specifically excluded.

A lot of learning is done in between therapy sessions and we encourage you to continue to support your child with this learning, based on the support and guidance from your early childhood intervention team.

If your family needs alternative strategies, please discuss these with your service provider. They can help you explore how to use every day routines and activities at home or in the community to progress towards your child's goals.

Childcare, preschool and school during COVID-19

The NDIS does not replace other support systems, such as those found in childcare, preschool, schools, hospitals and other services.

We encourage you to talk to your education provider about your child's specific education needs.

Decisions to close preschools and schools are decided by the relevant education authorities, State and Territory governments for government schools, and individual independent schools.

Childcare, preschools and schools remain open for those that need them, with most centres also offering online education. Each state has a different approach, and these are changing in response to the latest health advice.

At the bottom of this section is a list of links to the relevant education websites in your state or territory where you can get the most up to date advice.

Education aids

Education systems continue to be [responsible for supports](#) like resources and training for teachers, aids and equipment to make curriculums accessible, and day-to-day supervision of students at preschool and school, including behavioural support. Talk to your school or early childhood education and care service about your child's specific requirements.

The NDIS funds supports related to your child's disability to help them achieve the goals in their plan. These supports might include self-care, equipment like personal communication devices, or early childhood intervention supports that may be delivered during preschool program hours or within the school grounds during school hours.

Parents and carers of NDIS participants electing to undertake home based education because of community lock down due to COVID, are encouraged to talk to their school/teacher about the kinds of supports and resources they might need. If families don't have a school teacher, speak to your educational consultant or state government education

Links to State and Territory education information

Victorian [Department of Education's advice for parents](#) includes information for children with additional needs learning from home. The Department also provides [links to additional advice for parents and recommended apps](#).

NSW [Department of Education's advice to parents](#) includes advice on additional support for students with additional learning and support needs. The Department also provides information for parents with [children learning from home](#).

Queensland [Department of Education has a range of resources to support learning at home for children with disabilities](#).

South Australian [Department of Education has a number of questions and answers](#) for parents of children with disabilities.

Tasmanian [Department of Education has a number of frequently asked questions](#) for parents and carers, as well as resources for [learning from home](#).

Western Australian [Department of Education](#) has resources to support parents and carers and advice on [learning from home](#).

ACT [Department of Education's information on remote learning](#) for term four includes frequently asked questions for school families.

Northern Territory [Department of Education's Learning Together website](#) has a range of information for parents and carers.

Resources

[The NDIS website](#) will continue to be updated with general information, and information about COVID-19 and how it relates to the NDIS.

Australian Government [Department of Education, Skills and Employment](#) has information for [schools and students on their website](#).

Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education's guide to ['Learning from home during a time of crisis: COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\).'](#)

Children and Young People with Disability Australia have gathered a range of useful [resources about the rights of students with disability](#).

Raising Children's Network has published a [coronavirus guide for families](#).

The [Australian Childhood Foundation](#) has a range of [resources for parents](#) with children at home during this period.

[Reimagine Australia](#) is the peak body for early childhood intervention in Australia. They has general information about early childhood intervention and the NDIS.