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## Introduction

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is presenting unprecedented challenges for people with disability, families and carers and the whole Victorian community. The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) is working to ensure National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants continue to access essential supports during this challenging time.

We know many services and supports have been impacted by COVID-19 – your children might not be able to attend day programs, face-to-face therapy or receive the same level of in-home care services. We also know that this can impact on the wellbeing of you and your child.

With changing circumstances in Victoria, including the return to remote learning for most children, many parents and carers have questions about supports and services available for your child.

The NDIA is working with the Victorian Department of Education and Training to answer your questions.

The following is general information about support the NDIS is providing to children, young people, families and carers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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 one, on specific topics.

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

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

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](mailto:communications@ndis.gov.au)

## Advice on restrictions in Victoria

### Stage 4 restrictions in metropolitan Melbourne

Disability services, and the necessary support services that enable them, are identified as [permitted work](#) under Stage 4 restrictions.

In metropolitan Melbourne, employers that require their staff to attend a work site or participants home must issue a worker permit to their employees from 11.59pm on Wednesday 5 August 2020. Work permits can only be issued in line with Permitted Industry details which are outlined on the [Victorian Department of Health and Human Services website](#).

Employees in metropolitan Melbourne must carry the worker permit and photo identification when travelling to and from the workplace.

A permitted worker scheme template and guidance is available through the [Victorian Department of Health and Human Services website](#).



## Stage 3 restrictions in regional Victoria

Disability services may still be delivered across regional Victoria under Stage 3 restrictions.

Disability service providers need to consider the impact of any activity on an individual's health, including any underlying medical conditions and vulnerability, and the necessity of undertaking the activity.

See advice for the disability services sector on the [Victorian Department of Health and Human Services website](#).

## Support for participants

The NDIS has introduced a **range of measures** to ensure participants can continue to access the supports and services that are essential during the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

1. NDIS plans can be extended by up to 24 months, ensuring continuity of support.
2. Face-to-face planning shifted to telephone meetings where possible.
3. Temporarily broadened the [flexible approach for low cost Assistive Technology items](#) – allowing participants to access low cost AT items, such as smart devices and equipment, in consultation with their existing support [providers](#).
4. [Temporary changes to funding of Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\)](#) for personal care where COVID-19 is active your community, and the use of PPE is consistent with current health advice. Participants can now recover the costs to purchase PPE items using your NDIS funds, if you:
  - receive an average of at least one hour a day of face-to-face daily living supports, and
  - live in Victoria or New South Wales.
5. Participants can also pay for a one-off professional deep clean of their home with NDIS funding if a support worker attends their home and later tests positive to COVID-19. Participants may also be able to access additional Assistance with Daily Living and Short Term Accommodation (if needed) from NDIS funds. This is only available to participants in [Victoria](#).
6. To better support people with disabilities to apply to the NDIS while maintaining physical distancing during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we have made [our ARF and Supporting Evidence Form](#) available for download on our website.

The NDIA is working with the Department of Social Services (DSS), Services Australia and NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (NQSC) as well as the [Victorian Department of Health and Human Services](#) to deliver on our Pandemic Plan in line with the Government's Emergency Response Plan.

## Support for families and carers

Families can use their NDIS plans flexibly to access support workers in their homes, particularly in instances where children with a disability can no longer attend education or other programs.

Participants and their families or carers are encouraged to purchase supports that best meet their disability related needs, using their existing NDIS budget.

NDIS funding can pay for services and supports including self-care, equipment and assistive technology and therapies, social participation and capacity building supports.

Example: while it is not the role of a support worker to provide education to a participant, your child may have funding for a support worker talk about:

- providing in-home support
- adjusting their hours to a more suitable time
- supporting your child's personal needs
- provide support for daily tasks and capacity building activities
- assisting with resources online.

Social disconnection, uncertainty and change in routine can see an increased need for behavioural or mental health supports and therapies – talk to your child's therapists or providers about supports that may help.

We encourage participants, their families and carers to talk to providers about the ways they can use the supports within their current plan. It's important all supports and services are essential and follow the current [Stage 3 and 4 restrictions in place in Victoria](#).

Many Early Childhood partners and providers have been using tele practice and telehealth to deliver supports. These can be in real time, or it can be over a period of time using:

- Videoconferencing
- Emails
- Text messages, including sending photos and videos
- Phone calls
- Group chats online.

## Working with providers

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we are hearing about new ways providers are continuing to deliver services – some of these are online.

We recommend you start by working with your existing providers to discuss the best way to receive essential disability related services and supports while adhering to relevant state restrictions – this may include using available technology, developing exercise programs you can do at home or borrowing equipment and keeping in touch over the phone.

Your provider may also offer new programs and supports that you may be interested in – this is something you can discuss with them. Although your services and supports may look different at the moment, progress towards your plan goals should still be able to continue.

All providers should discuss work travel requirements with their support workers and participants. For more information, visit the [Victorian Department of Health and Human Services website](#).

## Using NDIS funding during COVID-19

We encourage participants, their families and carers to talk to providers about the ways they can use the supports within their current plan. Participants who have support coordination in their plan can use their funding flexibly to purchase increased support coordination to find and access disability related services during this time.

Participants can now use their **Core Supports** budget across all four funding categories (with the exception of the periodic transport funding), **without** the need to have their plan reviewed.

**Capacity Building Supports** budget can help build your independence and skills to help you reach your long-term goals. Unlike your Core Supports budget, your Capacity Building Supports budget cannot be moved from one support category to another. Funding can only be used to purchase approved individual supports that fall within that Capacity Building Supports category.

However, during the COVID-19 pandemic if you only have funding in your Capacity Building Supports budget, you can use a special line item to purchase your equipment (COVID-19 Low Cost AT to support Capacity Building support delivery 15\_222400911\_0124\_1\_3).

If you are self-managing your Capacity Building Supports budget, select “Improved Daily Living” as the support category when claiming (this is also the area also used to claim for therapeutic supports).

This only applies to low cost items purchased or rented in line with this policy after 1 April 2020.

More generally, NDIS funding can be used to pay for a number of services delivered in home, such as self-care related to a child’s disability, equipment and assistive technology and therapies as well as social participation and capacity building supports delivered online that might, under normal circumstances, be delivered at school or in the home.

For more information on how to use your budget during the COVID-19 pandemic, visit the [Using your budget page on the NDIS website](#).

### Using your funds flexibly scenarios

Supports previously delivered face-to-face may not be able to be delivered due to restrictions. You should ask your provider if supports can be delivered over the phone or by video call, or if group-based supports can be delivered on a one-on-one basis if they meet the Permitted Work guidelines.

Below are a range of scenarios to help explain how families and carers can use their NDIS funds flexibly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is important to follow the local health advice and make decisions on support workers in your home based on that health advice. All supports and services must be essential and follow the current Stage 3 and 4 restrictions in place in Victoria.

#### Scenario 1

From 7.00am to 8.30am in the morning, a support worker would generally help the participant prepare for the school day at a mainstream school. During COVID-19, the family determine they require essential disability related supports and agree to flexibly use their funds so that



the support worker starts later at 8.00am and finishes at 9.30am, to prepare the student for remote learning.

## Scenario 2

You previously had a support worker come to your home and take your child out into the community to achieve a goal. COVID-19 restrictions mean this is not possible. You talk to your provider about delivering the services in your home. Your provider uses digital technology to connect your child with friends and peers, achieving a similar outcome to the previous community activity. Your support worker can continue to support your child and to you as a family through in home support as long as it is essential and follows the current [Stage 3 and 4 restrictions in place in Victoria](#).

## Scenario 3

Since COVID-19 you have identified with your child that supporting and developing digital communication skills is needed to sustain community connections and build independence. You do not need to submit a plan review request if you want to update the goals and aspirations statement in your child's plan.

You talk to your existing provider who previously supported your child with community connections so they can modify their program to support and build confidence in developing digital communication skills

You want to make further changes to you plan so you talk to your planner, Early Childhood partner or Local Area Coordinator or phone 1800 800 100 and select option 5 to discuss your situation.

## Scenario 4

A current NDIS participant does not have support worker hours included in their plan because the bulk of a child's time is spent at school and previously the family has been able to manage the other hours and now that they are at home 24/7. Informal supports are not sustainable, the family or carer could first look at how they could use their existing funding to purchase essential disability related supports.

If your situation has significantly changed contact the NDIA on 1800 800 110 select option 5 to discuss your options and the potential for a plan review.

## NDIS and education

The NDIS does not replace other support systems, such as child care or schools. Education systems continue to be responsible for providing inclusive education supports like resources and training for teachers, aids and equipment to make education accessible.

While it is not the role of the NDIA to provide education, what we can and are doing is working with participants and their families to provide them with increased flexibility to access the disability related supports they need.

It is not the role of a support worker to provide education to children. However, if a child has funding for a support worker to provide in-home support, families can use those hours flexibly to better support their child's immediate personal disability-related needs and daily tasks.

By obtaining this disability support, or using it flexibly, it may help you in assisting your child while they are undertaking remote learning. This could include supports such as capacity building, therapies, online resources etc.

It's important all supports and services are essential and follow the current [Stage 3 and 4 restrictions in place in Victoria](#). The NDIA continues to work with the Victorian Government Department of Education and Training to provide answers to your questions about education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 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 school. Talk to your school or education provider about your child's specific requirement.

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 that may happen to be delivered during school hours.

Parents and carers of NDIS participants undertaking remote learning are encouraged to talk to their school/teacher about the kinds of supports and resources they might need including equipment, learning materials and technology where appropriate.

### Myth busting about education and the NDIS

**Is it true I can't use my NDIS funding between 9am – 3pm to support my child? I've been told I can't?**

This is false. You have choice and control over the supports you receive and when they are delivered. Just make sure you follow the current [Stage 3 and 4 restrictions in place in Victoria](#).

**People have told me that I can't use funds for community connection because I am under Stage 4 restrictions.**

This is false. You can talk to your providers about how they can deliver supports virtually. It could be helping the participant connect with friends or family using videoconferencing or supporting online activities which help achieve the participants' goal.

## Additional support for education

The [Victorian Department of Education and Training'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](#).

The recommendation is to talk to your school/school principal to discuss education support for your child.

You can also call the Department of Education and Training COVID-19 hotline during business hours (9am to 5pm) on 1800 338 663 (If you need an interpreter, call 131 450 first).

## NDIA offices in restricted postcodes in Victoria

Where possible, we are continuing to keep our offices across Victoria open, however to ensure the safety of participants, staff and other visitors, we have had to temporarily close some offices. Please check our [NDIS website](#) for the latest information on office closures.

Visits to our offices should be only be for urgent escalations or pre-booked appointments for participants who are unable to have a phone or video appointment. Where possible, participants should consider alternatives to face-to-face meetings either by contacting the NDIA through the National Contact Centre 1800 800 110 (selecting option 5), the enquiries inbox [enquiries@ndis.gov.au](mailto:enquiries@ndis.gov.au), or web chat options.

If visiting the office is your only option, please **contact us first** to book an appointment. You must not attend the office or your booked appointment if:

- You feel unwell
- You are meant to be isolation
- You have come in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case or with someone who is in isolation
- You or someone you live with is waiting on COVID19 test results
- Please also consider if your appointment is in line with current restrictions

If you attend an NDIA office without a pre-booked appointment, you will be asked to contact us to discuss your options and make an appointment.

We consider this to be the safest way to deliver new plans and plan reviews.

Our approach is based on the most current advice from health authorities. It is important to understand the advice is changing regularly, based on the spread of COVID-19. We will need to be flexible in our approach so we continue to respond to participant needs and local health advice.

## First plan meetings and plan reviews

If you are waiting for your first planning meeting, the meeting can still be held over the phone or online. You can talk to your Early Childhood partner, Local Area Coordinator or Planner about how to share information for your planning meeting.

If you need to change the way the funds are managed in your child's plan (e.g. so you can use non-registered providers), if your child's circumstances have significantly changed, you would like to move capacity building budgets or the plan is running out of funding, please

contact your Early Childhood partner if your child is under seven years of age, or Local Area Coordinator if your child is 7 years of age and above.

If your child's plan is due for a review, we will call you to discuss your child's or young person's current support needs, and 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.

If we have been unable to undertake a plan review, on the day your child's current plan ends it will be automatically extended by 365 days (1 year) to make sure you have the funding you need.

## Advice about face masks and face coverings

The Victorian Chief Health Officer has mandated the use of a face mask or face coverings for all residents of Victoria when outside your home, including the use of masks for disability workers. More than one million face masks will be available to disability support workers, providers and self-managed participants.

This advice does not apply to children (people aged under 12), people with breathing difficulties and anyone who has physical conditions that make it difficult to wear a face mask.

If you need Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) items like face masks, face shields and gloves, and the use of these items is directly related to your face-to-face daily living supports, you can use your core supports budget to purchase these [items](#).

For more information on PPE, read our [Latest Advice](#) and the ['Your health and safety'](#) FAQs on PPE.

[Advokit](#) also has a range of child centred Easy Read and social stories for the use of face masks.

## Finding Support Workers

The NDIA has developed an [online resource to help participants find support workers](#) and to assist providers to look for new staff. Resources include matching platforms, job boards and provider obligations.

Participants who are at risk due to lack of essential supports and services should contact the NDIA on 1800 800 110 and select option 5 to discuss options.

## Further advice

If you need additional assistance and your funds are low, call us on 1800 800 110 and select option 5. Special teams of planners in the NDIA are available to help.

The NDIA also works with experienced and qualified partner organisations to deliver Local Area Coordination and Early Childhood services to Australians with disability. They are the face of the NDIS in the community.

**Find your NDIS Partner in the Community** by clicking on your state on our [Partners in the Community page](#), and downloading the Partners in the Community map for [Victoria \(PDF 434KB\)](#).

## Additional resources

### National call centre

- Contact the NDIA 1800 800 110 and select option 5 to discuss your situation during the COVID-19 pandemic

### [NDIS website](#)

- [Latest advice for participants and providers](#)
- COVID-19 information in [Easy Read \(PDF 3.9MB\)](#), [Auslan](#) and [Languages other than English](#)
- [Information Packs](#)

### [NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission](#)

- Supporting NDIS participants
- Advice for providers on how to comply with their obligations
- Infection prevention and control training

### [Department of Health](#)

- Resources for Children, Aged Care, Families, Employers, Schools and Transport

### [Children and Young People with Disability Australia](#)

- Resources and advice

### [Council for Intellectual Disability](#)

- Various Easy Read resources

### [Department of Home Affairs – translated COVID-19 resources](#)

- A large range of factsheets and information in other languages

### [Victorian Department of Health and Human Services – translated COVID-19 resources](#)

- A large range of factsheets and information in other languages

### [Special Broadcasting Service \(SBS\) – translated COVID-19 resources](#)

- A large range of factsheets and videos in other languages