Australian Government
Department of Education

# Inclusion Support Program Guidelines

## Version 2.8

## November 2026

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Lands across Australia. We also acknowledge and extend our respect to Elders, past and present. We recognise and celebrate the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia, including their role in the education and care of children. We also acknowledge and recognise the rich histories and diverse cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the valuable contribution their diversity brings.

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The document must be attributed as the Inclusion Support Program Guidelines.

# Version control

| Date | Version | Description |
|---|---|---|
| **February 2016** | 1.0 | First release of the 2016-17 to 2018-19 ISP Guidelines |
| **May 2016** | 1.1 | Update prior to commencement of the Inclusion Support Programme (ISP, the Programme) on 1 July 2016 including addition of transition arrangements for In Home Care services (clause 7.2), changes to reflect the delay of the *Jobs for Families Child Care Package* from 2017 to 2018 and minor corrections |
| **March 2017** | 1.2 | Update following the commencement of the ISP on 1 July 2016 including clarifications to confirm policy intent for C4.3 (shared care arrangements) and D1 (Eligibility for IDF Subsidy for Immediate/Time-Limited Support) and other minor corrections including 'programme' to 'program' |
| **June 2017** | 1.3 | Minor correction to: Conditions of Funding at Appendix 2, wording, formatting, and update of item E4.3 Rates and Limits for Family Day Care (FDC) Top Up funding |
| **October - November 2019** | 2.0 Consultation draft | Consultation draft ISP Guidelines with a number of key proposed changes for sector feedback |
| **March 2020** | 2.1 | This version of the ISP guidelines has a date of effect of 30 March 2020 (for children in care from that date onwards) and replace the previous version 1.3. Changes to eligibility requirements to include a targeted cohort of children with additional needs in the early years (under six years of age at time of application) and expanding eligibility to children participating in a preschool program in a Centre-Based Day Care service where the child attracts Child Care Subsidy. Increased timeframe for IDF Subsidy for Immediate/Time-Limited from 8 to 12 weeks. Provide capacity for grant funding under the IDF Innovative Solutions Support stream to engage large organisations for collaborative and strategic projects |
| **August 2020** | 2.2 | Update to the IDF FDC Top Up rate for 2020-21 (Section 8.4) and clarifying GST arrangements for IDF Innovative Solutions Support (Section 11.2) |
| **July 2021** | 2.3 | Update to the IDF FDC Top Up rate for 2021-22 (Section 8.4) |
| **September 2022** | 2.4 | Update to the IDF FDC Top Up rate for 2022-23 (Section 8.4) |
| **July 2023** | 2.5 | Update to the IDF FDC Top Up rate for 2023-24 (Section 8.4) and page numbers |
| **October 2025** | 2.6 | Updated the legislative authority to *85GA (Funding Agreements) of the A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999* |

| Date | Version | Description |
|---|---|---|
| | | Strengthen services' NQF obligations for inclusion<br>Provide clarification around program objectives and compliance<br>Updated NDIS and ACECQA roles<br>Updated IDF-FDC Top Up rate for 2025-26 |
| **September 2026** | 2.7 | Updated IDF-FDC Top Up rate for 2026-27<br>Added *Financial Framework (Supplementary Powers) Regulations 1997* (FFSP) to Legislative Authority |
| **November 2026** | 2.8 | Editorial correction |

# Contents

Inclusion Support Program Guidelines ..... 1
1. Introduction and program overview ..... 7
1.1. What is inclusion? ..... 7
1.2. About the program ..... 8
1.3. Legislative authority ..... 10
1.4. Purpose of the guidelines ..... 11
1.5. Program objectives, guiding principles and desired outcomes ..... 11
1.6. Evaluation of the program ..... 12
1.7. National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) early childhood approach ..... 13
1.8. Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) ..... 14
2. Roles and responsibilities ..... 15
2.1. Inclusion Agencies (IA) ..... 15
2.2. Inclusion Development Fund Manager (IDFM) ..... 16
3. Who is eligible to apply? ..... 18
3.1. Services eligible for support ..... 18
4. Funding support under the program ..... 20
4.1. Inclusion Development Fund (IDF) ..... 20
5. Framework for accessing support ..... 24
5.1. Development and review of a Strategic Inclusion Plan ..... 24
5.2. Completion of a Strategic Inclusion Plan through the Inclusion Support Portal ..... 25
5.3. Identification of additional support ..... 25
5.4. Accessing specialist equipment through the Specialist Equipment Library ..... 26
5.5. Provision of documentary evidence ..... 27
5.6. Provision of permission to share personal information ..... 28
5.7. Conditions of funding ..... 28
5.8. Submitting an application for funding ..... 28
6. Inclusion Development Fund – Innovative Solutions Support ..... 29
6.1. Description ..... 29
6.2. Application requirements ..... 30
6.3. Collaborative and Strategic Projects ..... 31
6.4. Rates and limits ..... 32
7. Inclusion Development Fund - Immediate/Time-Limited Support ..... 33
7.1. Description ..... 33
7.2. Application requirements ..... 34
7.3. Submitting an application ..... 34

7.4. Rates and limits ..... 35
8. Inclusion Development Fund - Additional Educator ..... 36
8.1. Description ..... 36
8.2. Application requirements ..... 37
8.3. Submitting an application ..... 37
8.4. Rates and Limits ..... 38
8.5. Shared care arrangements ..... 39
8.6. Changes to the care environment ..... 39
9. Inclusion Development Fund - Family Day Care (FDC) Top Up ..... 40
9.1. Description ..... 40
9.2. Application requirements ..... 40
9.3. Submitting an application ..... 41
9.4. Rates and limits ..... 42
10. Assessment and outcome of applications ..... 43
10.1. Assessment of applications ..... 43
10.2. Outcome of application ..... 44
11. Program payments ..... 45
11.1. Claiming the Inclusion Development Fund ..... 45
11.2. Payment of the Inclusion Development Fund ..... 47
11.3. Review, extension and/or renewal of funding ..... 48
Appendix 1. Conditions of Funding ..... 49
Appendix 2. Other legislative requirements ..... 51
Appendix 3. Resources and links to relevant programs ..... 54
Glossary ..... 56

# 1. Introduction and program overview

## 1.1. What is inclusion?

The first five years are a critical time in a child's life. Emotional, social, cognitive and language development occurs at a faster rate in this period than in any other. Children experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage can have the most to gain from early childhood education and care (ECEC), reducing social disparities and disrupting intergenerational cycles of disadvantage.

There is substantial diversity among children who attend ECEC. Ensuring ECEC services and policy adequately respond to this diversity is a key part of ensuring children experience positive outcomes from ECEC. While most children in Australia thrive in their early years, many children across the community face barriers to participation in ECEC.

Inclusion is the responsibility of all ECEC service providers. Inclusion is stipulated in the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) and is a requirement for Child Care Subsidy (CCS) approval. Inclusion involves:

Taking into account all children's social, cultural and linguistic diversity (including learning styles, abilities, disabilities, gender, sexual identity, family circumstances and geographic location) in curriculum decision-making processes. The intent is to ensure that:

- all children's experiences are recognised and valued
- all children have equitable access to resources and participation, and opportunities to demonstrate their learning and to value difference.

This occurs when ECEC services work in partnership with families and other professionals to make informed and thoughtful decisions relating to curriculum, care and support. UNESCO *Policy guidelines on inclusion in education* states, it involves changes and modifications in policy, pedagogy, planning, experiences and the physical environment to overcome barriers, with a vision that covers all children and a belief that it is the responsibility of services and educators to support all children's learning and care.

Research shows that inclusion benefits all. Children with additional needs as well as children without additional needs, benefit academically and socially from interacting and participating in inclusive settings. Inclusion leads to stronger skills in literacy and numeracy as well as positive changes in children's confidence, self-esteem and understanding of diversity (through respecting the uniqueness of others). Inclusion also supports all children's rights, consistent with the United Nations (UN) *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and other international conventions, including the UN *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and UN *Declaration on the Rights of* Indigenous Peoples.

Under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA), service providers must not deny a child's access to a service on the basis of the child's disability or additional needs. Further, the National Quality Framework (NQF) including the National Quality Standard (NQS) and the Approved Learning

Frameworks (ALFs) require and guide services to make reasonable adjustments to their policies, pedagogy, planning, experiences and the physical environment to ensure the safety, health, wellbeing and optimal development of each and every child.

Inclusion must be viewed as being proactive in identifying the barriers and obstacles learners encounter in attempting to access opportunities for quality education, as well as removing those barriers and obstacles that lead to exclusion. Educators should hold the highest expectations for all children's learning and development, be committed to equity and believe in children's agency, competence and capacities to succeed, regardless of diverse circumstances and abilities (reflected in the EYLF principles).

### Additional needs:

While there is no national definition of 'additional needs', there are children who may need or require specific considerations or adaptations to participate fully in ECEC services (although not all children with additional needs will require support).

Additional needs may arise for children who:

- have a diagnosed disability or development delay (including awaiting disability diagnosis)
- are presenting with challenging behaviours
- have a serious medical or health condition, including mental health
- are presenting with trauma-related behaviours.

Additional needs may also mean meeting the needs and requirements of:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- children from refugee or humanitarian backgrounds
- may also require specific considerations, such as cultural support, to ensure that these children are able to participate fully in ECEC services and experience positive outcomes.

## 1.2. About the program

The Inclusion Support Program (the program, ISP) is a key component of the Government's Child Care Safety Net, which commenced in July 2016, as an early element of the Child Care Package, introduced in 2018. The Child Care Safety Net aims to give the most vulnerable children a strong start, while supporting parents or carers to increase their activity including work, study and training.

ISP is not a disability support program and does not provide one on one care for children with ongoing high support needs. The focus of the program is aimed at building the inclusion capacity and capability of eligible CCS approved ECEC service providers, where there are barriers to the participation of children with additional needs with their typically developing peers. The program helps to ensure all children have genuine opportunities to access, participate and achieve positive learning outcomes as per the Approved Learning Frameworks.

The program also assists service providers to implement their quality, inclusive and equitable obligations under the National Quality Framework (NQF) and in accordance with the National Quality Standard (NQS) and Approved Learning Frameworks.

In addition, the program supports service providers to deliver their inclusive practices obligations, by providing further support through:

**Inclusion Agencies (IAs)** – The department funds Inclusion Agency for each state and territory to work with eligible ECEC services in their jurisdiction. Inclusion Agencies provide direct support to services to build their capacity and capability to embed inclusive practice and address barriers to inclusion for children with additional needs. This support ranges from helping services with strategies to include children with additional needs, providing specialised advice in respect of particular issues, access to specialist equipment and endorsing applications for the Inclusion Development Fund (IDF).

**Specialist Equipment Library** - Each Inclusion Agency manages a Specialist Equipment Library for services in their jurisdiction to loan items of specialist equipment that facilitate and support the inclusion of a child (or children) where there are barriers to participation.

**Inclusions Development Fund Manager (IDFM)** - The Inclusion Development Fund Manager is contracted to the department to provide nationally consistent and equitable management of the Inclusion Development Fund (IDF).

**Inclusion Development Fund (IDF)** - The IDF provides funding to assist eligible ECEC service providers to further address barriers to inclusion that cannot be resolved by support provided by an Inclusion Agency or the Specialist Equipment Library. There are four discrete streams of Inclusion Development Fund support:

**IDF-Innovative Solutions Support** – provides support for eligible ECEC service providers to fund innovative, flexible and responsive solutions to inclusion where barriers have been identified and cannot be addressed by the support provided by the Inclusion Agency. This support is available for solutions to inclusion barriers other than a funding contribution for the employment of an Additional Educator.

ECEC Services with children over six years of age, with other additional needs, including children presenting with challenging behaviour or trauma-related behaviour, are encouraged to discuss the types of support available with their Inclusion Agency and consider flexible and responsive solutions to inclusion barriers through Innovative Solutions Support.

**IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support**– provides a funding contribution towards the short-term employment of an Additional Educator to support the inclusion of a child where there are high support needs and immediate barriers to participation, while an alternative and more stable solution is being determined and while the service builds their inclusion capability.

**IDF-Additional Educator** - provides a funding contribution towards the employment of an Additional Educator to support the inclusion of a child with ongoing high support needs, where there are barriers to participation, while the service builds their inclusion capability.

The program acknowledges that children may face delays seeking and obtaining disability diagnosis. As such, the program may provide IDF-Additional Educator support for the inclusion of children in Centre-Based Day Care and Outside School Hours Care with a diagnosed disability or awaiting disability diagnosis.

The program can also provide IDF-Additional Educator to include children under six years of age presenting with, developmental delay, serious medical or health condition, including mental health and challenging behaviour or trauma-related behaviour in Centre-Based Day Care.

**IDF-Family Day Care (FDC) Top Up** - provides support eligible Family Day Care services to include children with ongoing high support needs, by providing a top up payment, where including the child results in the educator being unable to enrol the maximum number of children as allowed under the National Law.

**NOTE**: Additional Educators do not provide individual (one-to-one) support for a child who has ongoing high support needs, as they work as a team with other educators to include all children within the care environment.

## 1.3. Legislative authority

The legislative authority for expenditure on the ISP is section 85GA (Funding Agreements) of the *A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999.*

The key legislation of the Family Assistance Law includes:

- *A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999*
- *A New Tax System (Family Assistance) (Administration) Act 1999*
- *Financial Framework (Supplementary Powers) Regulations 1997* (FFSP Regulations)

The following instruments are relevant to users of these guidelines:

- *Child Care Subsidy Minister's Rules 2017*

In addition, a service provider approved under Family Assistance Law is responsible for satisfying obligations under both Commonwealth and state and territory laws. This includes obligations to:

- comply with Family Assistance Law
- comply with the National Law and National Regulations and all related state or territory laws involving the operation of a child care service
  - including ensuring that background checks, including criminal history and working with children checks, are carried out for relevant staff and educators, this includes the employment of Additional Educators. Refer to the Child Care Provider Handbook located on the department's website for more details.

## 1.4. Purpose of the guidelines

These guidelines contain information for eligible ECEC service providers about the program, including:

- program objectives, guiding principles and desired outcomes
- types of inclusion support available
- how to access inclusion support
- eligibility criteria and requirements.

The guidelines first came into effect on 1 July 2016 and are updated periodically by the Department of Education ('the department') and published on its website. Service providers and ISP contractors will be advised in writing of any changes to these guidelines (through departmental communication methods).

## 1.5. Program objectives, guiding principles and desired outcomes

The program's objectives are to:

- support eligible CCS approved ECEC services to improve their capacity and capability to provide quality inclusive practices for all children, where there are barriers to the participation of children with additional needs and to support the inclusion of children with their typically developing peers
- provide parents or carers with access to appropriate and inclusive ECEC services that assist those parents or carers to increase their activity including work, study and training.

The guiding principles that underpin ongoing program delivery are:

- **Access** – eligible ECEC services, regardless of their geographic location or service type, have equitable access to support from the program to include children with additional needs
- **Participation** – the program supports the active and meaningful participation of all children, including children with additional needs, in eligible services
- **Strengths-based approach** – the existing capacity and capability of eligible services as well as children's strengths, skills and knowledge will be the starting point for determining the type and intensity of inclusion assistance and support required
- **Inclusion of all children** – the program first and foremost focuses on the inclusion of children with additional needs, where there are barriers to their participation. The goal is to provide opportunities for children to learn and develop alongside their typically developing peers, by building eligible services capacity and capability to provide an inclusive environment
- **National consistency** – across the nation, the program is delivered in an efficient, flexible, culturally appropriate and timely manner and is tailored to meet the inclusion needs of eligible service providers and the children participating in those services (outlined in the NQF and elements of the NQS, Quality Improvement Plan (QIP))





- **Integrated approach** – ISP contractors will work collaboratively with each other, State Regulators, the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) and other community and service providers, for example National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) early childhood partners, In Home Care Support Agencies and Settlement Service providers to support an integrated approach to service delivery that respects diversity and inclusion
- **Continuous capability development and resilience** – services will endeavour to work towards high quality and responsive practices and commit to continuously improving their inclusive practice by implementing and supporting tailored, flexible, innovative and appropriate solutions to address the barriers to inclusion in their service.

The desired outcomes of the program include:

- services have embedded inclusive practices in their service delivery model and, over time, have increased their capacity and capability to include children with additional needs, including children with ongoing high support needs and have reduced reliance on support from the program
- children with additional needs have an increased representation in CCS approved ECEC services, commensurate with their representation in the overall population
- parents or carers of children with additional needs have better access to and are aware of services inclusive practices that support their choices for work, study or training.

## 1.6. Evaluation of the program

The program is evaluated as part of the broader evaluation of the Child Care Package. The evaluation assesses the effectiveness of the program and the extent to which the objectives and desired outcomes are achieved. All ISP contractors are required to participate, and ECEC services may elect to participate in evaluation activities.

The measures of success in relation to children with additional needs and their families include:

- an increased number and participation of children with additional needs accessing services
- increased awareness of inclusion support services available for families of children with additional needs.

The measures of success in relation to services include:

- an increased number of services embedding inclusion strategies and practices
- an increase in knowledge, skills and confidence of educators in implementing inclusive strategies and practices
- greater awareness among services about support provided by Inclusion Agencies
- an increased number of services receiving support from Inclusion Agencies
- improved assessment and rating for the elements relating to inclusion in the NQS.

In addition, the performance of ISP contractors, including Inclusion Agencies and the Inclusion Development Fund Manager are monitored and evaluated in relation to the measures of success.

The department uses a range of data to assess the effectiveness of the program and the extent to which the objectives and desired outcomes have been achieved.

# 1.7. National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) early childhood approach

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) funds a range of supports and services for NDIS participants, which for children includes ensuring that parents and caregivers have the information, tools and support they need to help build a child's capacity within their everyday environments, like home and child care.

The NDIS early childhood approach supports children younger than 9 with a disability or children younger than 6 with development delay and their families and carers. Children younger than 6 who do not fully meet the definition of development delay and have developmental concerns are also supported though the early childhood approach.

Early childhood Partners deliver the early childhood approach and connect children and their families or carers to the right support, when they need it, so children can have the best possible start in life. As part of the early childhood approach, early childhood partners provide early connections. Early connections may include a combination of services such as connections to:

- mainstream and community services
- practical information that is relevant to a child's development
- other families for peer support
- early supports
- apply to the NDIS.

In remote areas of Australia where there are no early childhood partners, staff from the local NDIS office work directly with families or carers to connect them to services that best meet the needs of their child.

It is beneficial for services and ISP contractors to have an understanding of the NDIS early childhood approach and the different supports available to children and their families or carers and to work collaboratively to achieve quality inclusive practices for children. It is important to note that while the ISP supports eligible ECEC services and educators to focus on the inclusion needs of all children and address barriers that lead to exclusion, the NDIS is responsible for reasonable and necessary supports that are related to an individual's support needs.

The types of supports that the NDIS may fund for an individual child might include:

- specialised supports and therapy services to promote the child's development, well-being and community participation
- help by skilled personnel in aids or equipment assessment, set up and training
- mobility equipment.

The NDIS and ISP, although separate programs, are both directed at the inclusion of children with additional needs but do not replace the support provided by services under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and the *Disability Standards for Education (2005).*

Further information about the NDIS early childhood approach can be accessed through the NDIS website's early childhood approach.

# 1.8. Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA)

The Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) is an independent national body which manages the National Quality Framework and works with all governments to provide guidance, resources and services to support the ECEC sector to improve outcomes for children. ACECQA carries out its functions and operations under Education and Care Services National Law to meet expectations set by Education Ministers.

ACECQA works with the Australian and state and territory governments to:

- implement changes that benefit children from birth to 13 years of age and their families
- monitor and promote nationally consistent regulation of quality and safety in ECEC services across Australia, and
- to improve quality and safety outcomes for children.

The Inclusion Support program complements the work ACECQA undertakes to assist services to implement their quality, inclusive and equitable obligations under the National Quality Framework including those set out in the National Quality Standard and Approved Learning Frameworks. There are two nationally approved learning frameworks which outline practices that support and promote children's learning (A3.1 Relevant Links - Approved Learning Frameworks)

- Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia
- My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia

# 2. Roles and responsibilities

## 2.1. Inclusion Agencies (IA)

### 2.1.1. Who are they and what do they do?

The department funds Inclusion Agencies for each state and territory ('jurisdictions') to work with eligible ECEC services in their jurisdiction to build their capacity and capability to embed inclusive practice. There is no cost to eligible ECEC services to seek support from Inclusion Agencies.

Inclusion Agencies establish a network of Inclusion Professionals to provide tailored support to services in their jurisdiction, to ensure the inclusion of children with additional needs through capacity and capability building. Inclusion Agencies work with services to create solutions that address barriers to inclusion. This support must be appropriate (responsive and timely) and reflect the demographics and needs of the service and children within the service and may include (but not limited to):

- site visits to services to consider, examine and review care environments and existing inclusion capability and assist with reflective practice to support children's learning consistent with the EYLF and other Approved Learning Frameworks
- practical advice and strategies on effective and quality inclusive practice, including techniques for improvement and solutions to address particular barriers
- assistance to develop and/or review a Strategic Inclusion Plan
- support to access the Inclusion Support Portal to complete a Strategic Inclusion Plan
- facilitating access to the Specialist Equipment Library
- reviewing and endorsing (or non-endorsement of) applications for support under the Inclusion Development Fund.

Where feasible and appropriate Inclusion Agencies may also use technologies such as teleconferencing, email, social networking and other developments in information technology to deliver inclusion support to services. For example, technology such as MS Teams may be appropriate to facilitate communication in remote areas or across jurisdictions.

### 2.1.2. Management of the Specialist Equipment Library

Each Inclusion Agency manages a Specialist Equipment Library for services in their jurisdiction to loan items of specialist equipment that facilitate and support the inclusion of a child (or children) with additional needs, where there are barriers to their participation.

### 2.1.3. How to access support from Inclusion Agencies

Services seeking Inclusion Agency support may self-refer directly via telephone or email. Inclusion Agencies are also expected to engage with services directly to offer inclusion support (especially those services that have not been aware of the assistance available under the program and those communities that have higher concentrations of additional needs). Following initial support from an Inclusion Agency through face-to-face visits or other communication methods the specific

arrangements for accessing support from an Inclusion Agency are outlined on the relevant Inclusion Agency website.

Contact details for the Inclusion Agency in each jurisdiction are available on the department's website.

# 2.2. Inclusion Development Fund Manager (IDFM)

## 2.2.1. Who are they and what do they do?

The Inclusion Development Fund Manager (IDFM) is contracted to the department to provide nationally consistent and equitable application of the Inclusion Development Fund (IDF).

The IDF provides funding to assist eligible ECEC service providers to further address barriers to inclusion that cannot be resolved by support provided by an Inclusion Agency or the Specialist Equipment Library. There are four discrete streams of Inclusion Development Funding support:

- IDF-Innovative Solutions Support
- IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support
- IDF-Additional Educator and
- IDF-Family Day Care (FDC) Top Up

The Inclusion Development Fund Manager is the single national organisation that is responsible for:

- ensuring a nationally consistent application of these guidelines, and any other information provided by the department, when assessing, and administering the Inclusion Development Fund
- facilitating equitable access to Inclusion Development Fund assistance for all eligible ECEC service providers
- assessing Inclusion Development Fund applications from service providers
- recommending an outcome for applications made to the Inclusion Development Fund against the eligibility criteria contained in these guidelines and where appropriate, declines Inclusion Development Fund applications
- processing and notifying service providers of the outcome of their (approved or non-approval) application according to the recommended timeframes:
    - within 5 business days of receipt of complete applications for IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support and urgent IDF-Innovative Solutions Support
    - within 15 business days of receipt of complete applications for IDF-Additional Educator, the IDF-FDC Top Up and routine IDF-Innovative Solutions Support applications
- notifying service providers and the relevant Inclusion Agency within 5 business days if the application is incomplete and seeking further information necessary to progress the application

NOTE: If the assessment process identifies errors or omissions in the application, service providers may be contacted to correct, complete or explain the information. The application may

not be considered complete and accurate for the Inclusion Development Fund Manager to assess within the recommended timeframes, until this further information is received.

- responding to all enquiries within 5 business days
- maintaining an up-to-date website with information on the Inclusion Development Fund, and a 1800 phone number to respond to enquiries and provide guidance on applying for the Inclusion Development Fund.

While the Inclusion Development Fund Manager is responsible for assessing and recommending applications for funding, payment is made directly to the service by the department and occurs retrospectively following a claims process, or after acceptance of a Letter of Offer for IDF-Innovative Solutions Support.

### 2.2.2. Communication, appeals and complaints

The Inclusion Development Fund Manager engages with services, Inclusion Agencies and families about the Inclusion Development Fund, including providing information about, and support to meet eligibility requirements, application processes, funding levels and responding to queries and complaints. Information about communication processes, including complaints mechanisms and appeals processes is available on the Inclusion Development Fund Manager's website, which can be accessed through the department's website.

### 2.2.3. Compliance and program monitoring

The Inclusion Development Fund Manager and the department undertake regular compliance checks on services accessing Inclusion Development Fund support to confirm the Inclusion Development Fund is being used in accordance with the service providers approved application, these guidelines and compliance measures as published on the department's website.

Services must meet all reasonable requests from the Inclusion Development Fund Manager or the department in a timely way.

# 3. Who is eligible to apply?

## 3.1. Services eligible for support

ECEC services eligible for support through the program are service providers that have been approved by the department for the provision of the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) under the Family Assistance Law. The Family Assistance Law is the basis for Commonwealth child care fee assistance, which includes the Child Care Subsidy and Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS). The Family Assistance Law also provides for the approval of these services to administer the Child Care Subsidy on behalf of families.

### Eligible services and available support

Centre-Based Day Care

- Inclusion Agency support
- Specialist Equipment Library
- IDF-Innovative Solutions Support
- IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support
  - to include children with additional needs where there are immediate barriers to participation
- IDF-Additional Educator
  - to include children with ongoing high support needs, where there are barriers to participation with;
    - diagnosed disability or development delay (including awaiting disability diagnosis)

  Where the child is under 6 years of age:
    - presenting with challenging or trauma related behaviour
    - serious medical or mental health conditions

Outside School Hours Care (before school, after school, and vacation care):

- Inclusion Agency support
- Specialist Equipment Library
- IDF-Innovative Solutions Support
- IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support
  - to include children with additional needs, where there are immediate barriers to participation
- IDF-Additional Educator
  - to include children with ongoing high support needs, where there are barriers to participation with;
    - diagnosed disability or awaiting disability diagnosis

Family Day Care:

- Inclusion Agency support
- Specialist Equipment Library
- IDF-Innovative Solutions Support
- IDF-Family Day Care Top Up

The child (or children) the service is seeking to include through support from the program, must meet the eligibility requirements for Child Care Subsidy (CCS) as determined by Services Australia. Families who have not tested their CCS eligibility with Services Australia should do so before the service includes the child's information in the service provider's IDF application. ECEC service providers are responsible for ensuring the IDF application does not include children where a child's Child Care Subsidy (CCS) eligibility has not been confirmed.

### 3.1.1. Centre-Based Day Care services providing a kindergarten/preschool program

CCS Approved Centre-Based Day Care services that provide state or territory government funded kindergarten/preschool programs are eligible to apply to access Commonwealth support through Inclusion Agencies and the Inclusion Development Fund (IDF). It is a requirement that services operating kindergarten/preschool programs explore and access state/territory government resources to support inclusion of children with additional needs during the sessions, prior to accessing IDF support through the Commonwealth's Inclusion Support Program. For Example, If the state/territory government support available to the service is similar to IDF, such as, subsidises the employment of an Additional Educator, or addresses the barriers to inclusion for children with additional needs, this will impact on the need for IDF.

### 3.1.2. Other relevant organisations

The department, at its discretion, may provide grant funding under IDF-Innovative Solutions Support stream to relevant organisations (including ECEC peak bodies, inclusion specialists, disability organisations and other inclusion entities) for the purposes of developing and implementing Collaborative and Strategic Projects that promote high level innovation and support for inclusive practice.

### 3.1.3 Services not eligible for support through the program

Services not listed in Section 3.1 (above) are not eligible for support from the program, including (but not limited to):

- In Home Care services (note: IDF-Innovative Solutions Support funding can be provided to Centre-Based Day Care, Outside School Hours Care or Family Day Care for projects to support the transition of children from In Home Care to other approved service types)
- Specialist ECEC services
- State and territory government occasional care, preschools, kindergartens and early intervention services.

### 3.1.4. Specialist services

Services specifically designed to meet the needs of children with ongoing high support needs are considered specialist services. By their nature, specialist services have inherent capacity and capability to include children with ongoing high support needs. Additionally, as generally all of the children enrolled at a specialist services have ongoing high support needs, the environment does not provide the opportunity for children with additional needs to be included in a care environment with their typically developing peers, which is a key objective of the program. Given this, specialist services, programs or care environments are not eligible for assistance under this program.





# 4. Funding support under the program

## 4.1. Inclusion Development Fund (IDF)

### 4.1.1. Description

The Inclusion Development Fund (IDF) provides funding to assist eligible ECEC service provides to further address barriers to inclusion that cannot be resolved by support provided by an Inclusion Agency or the Specialist Equipment Library. There are four discrete streams of Inclusion Development Funding support which have the same broad application process, although there are slight variations to eligibility criteria, assessment and approved funding purposes.

Applications for Inclusion Development Funding Streams should only be applied for where it's agreed by the Inclusion Agency that other supports available and implemented will not be sufficient to embed capability or capacity of inclusion within the service.

#### Inclusion Development Funding streams

1. IDF-Innovative Solutions Support
2. IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support
3. IDF-Additional Educator
4. IDF-Family Day Care (FDC) Top Up

### 4.1.2. Available funding

Applications for funding can be made at any time during the program to provide responsive support to services as they enrol children with additional and ongoing high support needs, where barriers to participation exist. Applications will be considered on their merits, in general, requests for funding to build the ongoing capability of services will be prioritised. The approval of applications made under any stream of the Inclusion Development Fund is contingent on the availability of funding.

The Inclusion Development Fund has an annual capped funding allocation, which is set each financial year. In the event that demand exceeds available funding allocated within the capped program, funding will be prioritised to support ECEC Services in building their inclusive practices for children with a diagnosed disability and children awaiting a disability diagnosis. The Inclusion Development Fund Manager can advise Inclusion Agencies and service providers about the availability of funding.

The program does not prescribe an explicit list of additional needs, disabilities or vulnerabilities (including medical conditions) that determines whether or not the service provider is eligible to access funding under the Inclusion Development Fund. The service provider seeking funding is responsible for demonstrating that, due to the supports the child (or children) may require, and the

inclusion barriers within the care environment, funding support is required in addition to the Inclusion Agency supports, to ensure the participation of all children. Demonstration is achieved through the service developing a Strategic Inclusion Plan, in collaboration with its Inclusion Agency and supported by information provided in the application.

### 4.1.3. Conditions of Funding

The Conditions of Funding outline the requirements the service provider must adhere to if approved for funding. By agreeing to the Conditions of Funding the service provider declares it has prepared the application in accordance with these guidelines and will use funding only for the approved purposes and as detailed in the application and approval given. An Inclusion Development Fund application can only be submitted and considered for approval if the service provider agrees to the Conditions of Funding (Appendix 1).

The service provider must notify the Inclusion Development Fund Manager of any changes to the circumstances in the original application, when a significant change in the care environment occurs.

### 4.1.4. Non-approved purposes for funding

Service providers are required to meet the requirements of National Law and Regulations and the Inclusion Development Fund cannot be used by services to meet these obligations or to fund services for support that is appropriately provided by another entity.

Inclusion Development Fund support cannot be approved for the following purposes:

- one-to-one support for a specific child for the majority of time they are in the care environment, or the majority of time Inclusion Development Fund support is requested
- assistance for which funding is the responsibility of a state or territory government, other Australian Government programs or other bodies (including school education)
- to provide assistance to access other services, such as one-to-one early intervention or therapy sessions
- assistance to meet licensing requirements outlined in the National Regulations (or relevant state or territory legislation)
  - this includes ensuring adequate supervision and maintaining educator-to-child ratios, including any additional requirements specified in a service's individual conditions of approval that exceed the minimum regulatory standards
- address circumstances that result in temporary barriers to inclusion, such as short-term or one-off increases in children's attendance, or child injury (e.g. a broken leg), illness or related treatments (e.g. recovery from surgery)
- the provision of transportation of a child to/from the service, on transport not operated by the educator or service
- 'fill a gap' while the service provider applies for longer-term IDF-Additional Educator and when an approval for this IDF stream may be given
- to subsidise an Additional Educator to solely administer medical/nursing assistance or backfill an existing staff member to do so. Medical/nursing assistance is defined as anything that is not covered by general first aid procedures and that requires specific training. Examples of medical/nursing assistance include (but not limited to):
  - administration of insulin and monitoring of glucose levels
  - oxygen administration and monitoring
  - percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy (PEG) feeding.

Note: Service providers are obligated to meet the requirements of National Law and regulations. The *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011* set out regulations around services for managing medical conditions of children (Regulations 90, 91 and 92 refer). Under these regulations an approved provider must ensure policies and procedures are in place for dealing with medical conditions in children including the administration of any medication. The service provider is required to ensure staff have the appropriate training to deal with children with medical conditions.

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) have policy and procedure guidelines on Dealing with Medical Conditions in Children. ACECQA also offer training courses for educators.

In summary, approved services must have a policy and appropriate processes for managing medical conditions.

Where funding for an Additional Educator has been approved, the additional staffing allocation is to exceed minimum regulatory standards and must not be used to meet standard operational requirements. Therefore:

- The Additional Educator is not to be utilised to backfill educators undertaking programming and planning, training, meetings, or other non-contact duties
- The Service remains responsible for ensuring adequate supervision of children and compliance with educator-to-child ratio requirements as prescribed by the National Regulations.

**IDF-FDC Top Up** cannot be approved to engage an Additional Educator in a Family Day Care environment and where the care is provided to children who are in a kind of relationship listed in the *Child Care Subsidy Minister's Rules 2017*.

FDC Top Up funding is provided to compensate a Family Day Care educator for the reduced enrolment capacity that results from including a child with ongoing high support needs. The purpose of the funding is to offset the financial impact of reduced enrolments — not to subsidise arrangements that restore maximum child capacity permitted under the National Law**.**

**IDF-Innovative Solutions Support** cannot be used for the following purposes:

- purchasing specialist equipment or resources
- medical and therapeutic interventions
- settlement services for migrants where funding is available through other programs
- support where more appropriate funding is available through an alternative Inclusion Development Funding stream
- support where more appropriate funding is provided by state/territory governments or other agencies or through other Australian Government programs, such as NDIS early connections assistance.

Note: if services would like to seek clarification regarding non-approved purposes, they should talk to the Inclusion Development Fund Manager in the first instance.

### 4.1.5. Assessment and recommendation of Inclusion Development Fund applications

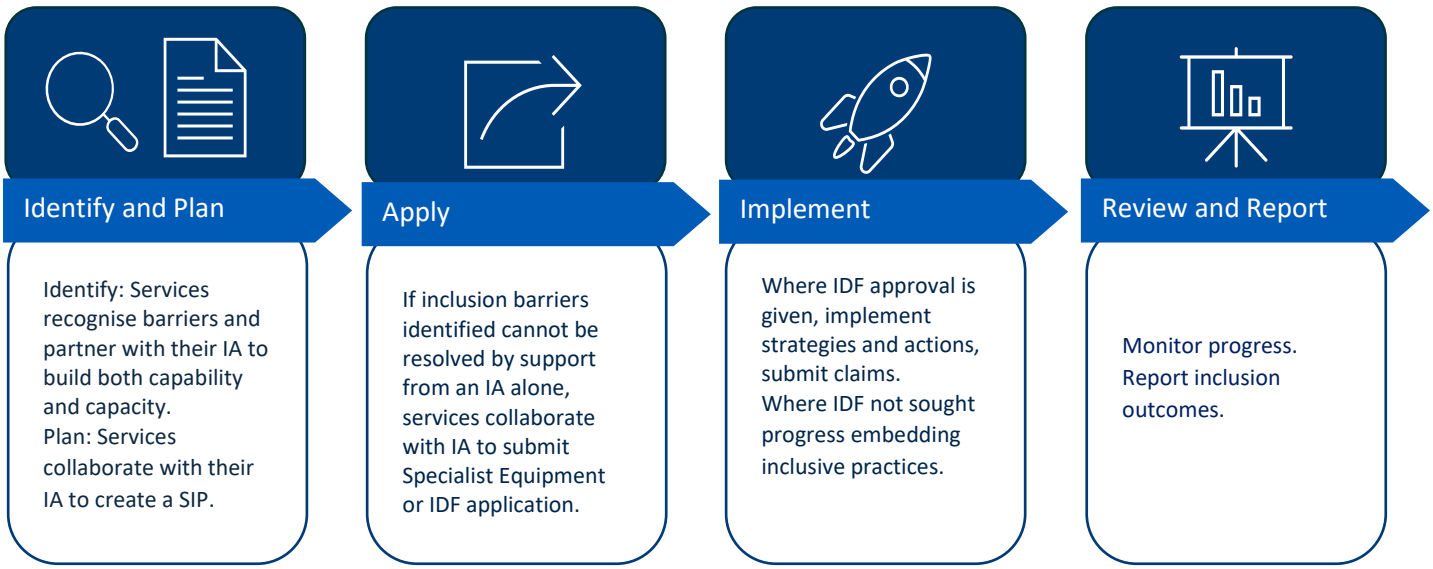
Inclusion Agencies work with the Inclusion Development Fund Manager in adherence with these guidelines to provide an initial screening of funding applications. Inclusion Agencies will not endorse a funding application that does not meet these guidelines and application requirements.

The Inclusion Development Fund Manager assesses and makes recommendations to the department for approval or non-approval (where appropriate) of Inclusion Development Fund applications. They ensure the assessment of applications from all streams of funding is nationally consistent and the Inclusion Development Fund eligibility requirements contained in these guidelines is applied equitably.

### 4.1.6. Exemptions

Where exceptional circumstances can be clearly demonstrated, additional support may be considered on a case-by-case basis and is subject to departmental approval. However, generally exemptions outside the scope of the Guidelines, such as requests for one-to-one support, will not be granted.

# 5. Framework for accessing support




## 5.1. Development and review of a Strategic Inclusion Plan

A Strategic Inclusion Plan is an inclusion assessment and planning tool for eligible ECEC services that includes short and longer-term strategies for improving and embedding inclusive practice. The development of a Strategic Inclusion Plan by services, guided by the Inclusion Agency, recognises current inclusive capacity and capability and outlines objectives for quality inclusion practices. The Strategic Inclusion Plan includes an inclusion profile for each care environment in which the service provider is seeking support.

The Strategic Inclusion Plan is regarded as a 'living' document, implemented, updated on a continual basis and reviewed within a 12-month period. A Strategic Inclusion Plan reflects any changes and records the progress made. The 12-month review provides an opportunity to evaluate the status of inclusion barriers and strategies, including reviewing loans of any specialist equipment item/s from the Specialist Equipment Library.

Following initial support from an Inclusion Agency through face-to-face visits or other communication methods (e.g. via online/email), all services receiving support through the program must develop a Strategic Inclusion Plan. The Inclusion Agency can provide assistance to services to develop their Strategic Inclusion Plan through initial meetings. The development of a Strategic Inclusion Plan is the mechanism for accessing support from the program and is necessary to obtain funding through the Inclusion Development Fund. Once completed, a Strategic Inclusion Plan must be reviewed by the Inclusion Agency.

A Strategic Inclusion Plan must identify the:

- current inclusion capability and barriers that impact on the service's capacity to include children with additional needs
- proposed strategies to address barriers to inclusion, which may include (but not limited to):
  - changes to educator practices, planning, policy, physical environment and experiences to increase the participation of children with additional needs and embed inclusive practice in the care environment
  - specialised inclusion training, mentoring or coaching, or specific inclusion resources required by educators
  - developing policies and practices the service may use to support future inclusion
  - identifying resources and support services available in the local community to assist with the inclusion of children with additional needs
  - developing a project to support the inclusion of a child (or children) and build educator skills, knowledge and confidence
  - accessing an Additional Educator to increase educator to child ratios above the minimum requirements mandated in the National Regulations (or relevant state or territory legislation).

## 5.2. Completion of a Strategic Inclusion Plan through the Inclusion Support Portal

The Inclusion Support Portal is the avenue through which services interact with the program to complete their Strategic Inclusion Plan online and apply for funding through any of the four streams of the Inclusion Development Fund.

The service will need to ensure they have access to the Inclusion Support Portal. Once the service has made initial contact with its Inclusion Agency to seek support, the Inclusion Agency may generate a shell Strategic Inclusion Plan. The service may commence developing a Strategic Inclusion Plan immediately or in collaboration with their Inclusion Agency.

Where the service does not have the necessary infrastructure to support the Inclusion Support Portal, a paper-based Strategic Inclusion Plan is available through their Inclusion Agency. A paper-based Strategic Inclusion Plan may also be completed by a Family Day Care Coordination Unit to engage in service-wide inclusion planning.

## 5.3. Identification of additional support

Through the development of a Strategic Inclusion Plan, an inclusion barrier (or barriers) may be identified that cannot be resolved by support from an Inclusion Agency alone, which may require additional support to address. In these circumstances, the program provides further support to services through the Specialist Equipment Library and the Inclusion Development Fund.





# 5.4. Accessing specialist equipment through the Specialist Equipment Library

The service's need for specialist equipment must be evidenced through barriers to inclusion identified and documented in the Strategic Inclusion Plan. Recommendations by a relevant professional, such as an occupational therapist or physiotherapist, with knowledge of the child's biomechanical functional needs can support the Strategic Inclusion Plan development. If equipment is recommended by a relevant professional, the Inclusion Agency may endorse and agree to the recommendation before an application is submitted.

Equipment available from the Specialist Equipment Library may include (but not limited to):

- portable ramps to create access to the care environment
- standing frames and full support swings to allow a child (or children) with high physical needs to participate in the daily program and activities
- hoists, slings, harnesses, change tables, toilet sets or steps, potty chairs, mobile stools and seating or posture aids for educators to assist them to lift and transfer children safely when carrying out basic care functions such as changing or going to the toilet
- specialised inclusion toys such as sensory or switch toys
- specialised furniture such as chairs, tables, desk and positioning equipment
- communication cards or charts, and Auslan dictionaries to enable the child (or children) and educators to communicate effectively
- resources to support the inclusion of Indigenous children and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, such as books in languages other than English.

Equipment not available from the Specialist Equipment Library includes (but not limited to):

- therapeutic equipment (for example, hearing aids and therapist tables)
- equipment that the service would reasonably be expected to supply as part of the provision of a quality early learning environment
- equipment that the parent or carer would reasonably be expected to supply for their child (for example, wheelchairs, walking frames and body suits)
- equipment for which there are hygiene issues
- equipment provided under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

To access specialist equipment, services must sign a Loan Agreement Form with its Inclusion Agency, which sets out the Terms and Conditions associated with borrowing equipment from the Specialist Equipment Library. The process for accessing equipment from the Specialist Equipment Library, including expected timeframes, transportation arrangements, return arrangements and the Terms and Conditions associated with borrowing the equipment are determined by the Inclusion Agency.

To allow for quick access to specialist equipment by the service before a Strategic Inclusion Plan is completed, the Inclusion Agency can determine an appropriate timeframe for the service to complete the Strategic Inclusion Plan as part of the loan agreement with the Specialist Equipment Library.

It is the responsibility of each service accessing equipment from the Specialist Equipment Library to ensure it is fitted by an appropriate professional. In some cases, an occupational therapist or physiotherapist who has knowledge of the child's biomechanical functioning and needs may be necessary.

The Inclusion Agency or Inclusion Professional will follow-up with the service following delivery of the equipment to ensure the equipment meets the desired needs of the service (i.e., addresses the barriers identified in the Strategic Inclusion Plan) and the equipment is being used appropriately and correctly by service educators.

The service can access information about the Specialist Equipment Library directly from their Inclusion Agency. Contact details for the Inclusion Agency in each jurisdiction are available on the department's website.

## 5.5. Provision of documentary evidence

The service providers seeking to apply for IDF-Additional Educator or IDF-FDC Top Up must provide current (dated within 12 months, if not a permanent disability), signed, or otherwise validated documentation, by relevant professionals that demonstrates the child has additional and ongoing high support needs. This may include children with a diagnosed disability or awaiting disability diagnosis (undergoing a current and ongoing assessment for disability), or other additional needs.

Documentary evidence can be provided by a range of relevant professionals including (but not limited to):

- registered psychologists
- allied health professionals (for example, speech pathologists, physiotherapists and audiologists) or social workers and family counsellors
- qualified medical practitioners
- registered nurses or nurse practitioners, including Maternal and Child Health nurses.

Documentary evidence may include (but not limited to):

- the child's health care card stating the disability code
- evidence that the child is a NDIS participant under Section 28 of the NDIS Act 2013
- diagnosis by a qualified medical/health practitioner or registered psychologist
- a report or supporting documentation signed by an allied health professional, registered nurse or nurse practitioner, Maternal and Child Health nurses, social worker/family counsellor of the current and ongoing assessment of a child
- an appointment letter or referral for an assessment by a qualified medical/health practitioner or registered psychologist
- supporting documentation, such as a diagnostic report, signed by a qualified medical/health practitioner, registered psychologist or social worker
- documentation stating a child's eligibility for Child Disability Allowance or parent or carer eligibility for Carers Allowance with respect to the child.

### 5.5.1. Evidence of permanent disability

Documentary evidence that supports permanent disability will not be required to be submitted with future applications while the child is enrolled at the same service.

Note: If the additional need is disability, the service should be guided by the 'Guide to Social Security Law, 1.1.R.90 Recognised disability CA (child)' in considering the impact of the child's disability.

## 5.6. Provision of permission to share personal information

The documentary evidence requirements outlined above require parents or carers to share personal information about their child's additional needs with their service and to disclose the information to the Inclusion Agency, Inclusion Development Fund Manager and the department, to use for the purpose of administering Inclusion Development Fund support.

To ensure adherence to the requirements of the Australian Privacy Principles contained within the *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth),* parents or carers are required to sign a Permission to Share Personal Information consent form between the service and the parent or carer.

IDF applications will not be assessed unless a correctly completed and signed Permission to Share Personal Information consent form is attached to the application, by the service.

The Permission to Share Personal information form is available on the department's website.

## 5.7. Conditions of funding

The service provider must agree to the Conditions of Funding (Appendix 1) before an Inclusion Development Fund application can be submitted and considered for assessment by the Inclusion Development Fund Manager.

## 5.8. Submitting an application for funding

Inclusion Development Fund applications must be completed adhering to specific requirements (see relevant sections under each Inclusion Development Fund support stream) and submitted through the Inclusion Support Portal for assessment by the Inclusion Development Fund Manager once the application requirements have been completed and the application has been endorsed by the Inclusion Agency.

# 6. Inclusion Development Fund – Innovative Solutions Support

Eligible services are:

1. Centre-Based Day Care
2. Outside School Hours Care
3. Family Day Care

## 6.1. Description

The IDF-Innovative Solutions Support is available for eligible ECEC services to fund innovative, flexible and responsive solutions to inclusion where barriers have been identified and cannot be addressed by the support provided by the service's Inclusion Agency. This support is available for solutions to inclusion barriers other than a contribution funding towards the employment of an Additional Educator.

The department may also provide IDF-Innovative Solutions Support to relevant organisations (including ECEC peak bodies, inclusion specialists, disability organisations and other inclusion entities) for Collaborative and Strategic Projects that promote high level innovation and support for inclusive practice.

IDF-Innovative Solutions Support aims to provide flexible funding to empower services to carefully consider their inclusion challenges and take an active role in finding solutions, which intrinsically builds inclusion capacity and capability. Examples of approved purposes for which this funding may be used include:

- cultural advice and mentoring including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentoring and community engagement (for example, services from cultural experts such as Indigenous community elders, bicultural support workers, consultants)
- bilingual support (for example, translating and interpreting services and/or bilingual workers to engage with parents or carers and/or work with educators to help settle a child (or children) from a culturally and linguistically diverse, refugee or humanitarian background)
- collaboration with specialists to obtain specialist advice on how to include a child (or children) with additional needs (including developmental delays, challenging behaviours or severe allergies) beyond the expertise of the Inclusion Agency for example, trauma specialised advice or advice from early childhood intervention specialists or dieticians which may include travel and accommodation costs for the specialist
- specialised inclusion training to ensure and optimise the inclusion of children with additional needs, including those with disabilities and high or complex support needs (such as specific inclusion training support sessions on trauma-informed practice for educators; facilitating

inclusion and participation for children with Autism; communicating with and supporting parents or carers of children with additional needs)
- networking and community engagement (for example, service visits to view quality inclusive practices and engage in professional dialogue/conversations or engagement with other agencies to collaboratively manage the successful transition of a child (or children) with additional needs, for example, In Home Care to CCS approved ECEC services).

For more information refer to non-approved purposes for funding (4.1.4).

IDF-Innovative Solutions Support also provides a valuable opportunity to collect new data and inform best practice for including children with additional needs in CCS Approved ECEC services.

# 6.2. Application requirements

## 6.2.1. Development of a Strategic Inclusion Plan

Prior to applying for IDF-Innovative Solutions Support, the eligible ECEC service must complete a Strategic Inclusion Plan in collaboration with its Inclusion Agency.

If through the development of a Strategic Inclusion Plan, a barrier (or barriers) to inclusion is identified, for which additional funding support would assist in addressing the identified inclusion barrier, the service may consider making an application under IDF-Innovative Solutions Support. The Strategic Inclusion Plan will form a component of the application for funding. Further requirements for the IDF-Innovative Solutions Support are outlined below.

Where an application for IDF-Innovative Solutions Support is considered urgent, a Strategic Inclusion Plan is not required at the time of application. The service is required to complete the Strategic Inclusion Plan following the assessment and outcome of the application.

## 6.2.2. Submitting an application

To access IDF-Innovative Solutions Support, the service must submit an application (project proposal) for funding which has been endorsed by its Inclusion Agency, to the Inclusion Development Fund Manager outlining:

- the inclusion barrier, including a description of the child (or children) the barrier is associated with, and why funding is needed to address it, noting this inclusion barrier must be identified in the Strategic Inclusion Plan
- evidence that a Strategic Inclusion Plan has been developed by the service and reviewed by the Inclusion Agency and the service has considered its internal capacity to address the inclusion barrier including relevant requirements under the NQF and support available from its Inclusion Agency:
  - where the IDF-Innovative Solutions Support application is not endorsed by the Inclusion Agency, the service is still able to submit its application to the Inclusion Development Fund Manager for assessment
- evidence that funding for the required purpose is not available elsewhere
- an overview of the intended outcome of funding, including estimated timeframes and milestones

- financial quotes to support the total value of funding being sought, inclusive of GST
- the total duration and value of funding sought and budget breakdown for goods and services to be funded.

### 6.2.3. Conditions of Funding

The service must agree to the Conditions of Funding (Appendix 1).

### 6.2.4. Assessment criteria

All proposals will be assessed by the Inclusion Development Fund Manager against the following essential criteria with equal weighting:

- the extent to which the proposal would lead to enhanced inclusion capacity and capability of the service and educators
- the extent to which the proposal would lead to the genuine inclusion of a child (or children) with additional needs
- the extent to which the proposal can be realistically implemented
- the capacity of the service and/or eligible applicant to deliver the proposal
- the extent to which no alternative or more appropriate funding sources have been identified or sourced.

All proposals will be assessed against the above essential criteria, but will also take into consideration:

- value for money
- level of risk involved
- quality of deliverables.

The Inclusion Development Fund Manager may seek further information from the service as deemed necessary to determine the merit and likely success of the proposal. Proposals and any attachments lodged with the Inclusion Development Fund Manager become the property of the Australian Government from the date received and will not be returned to the applicant.

### 6.2.5. Submission

An application for IDF-Innovative Solutions Support may relate to the care environment where an inclusion barrier or barriers are identified. IDF-Innovative Solutions Support may also provide funding for innovative and flexible solutions that are in the context of the whole service. The Inclusion Development Fund application is submitted through the Inclusion Support Portal for assessment by the Inclusion Development Fund Manager once the application requirements have been completed and the application has been endorsed by the Inclusion Agency. Where an application is considered as urgent, the Inclusion Agency will also mark the application accordingly.

## 6.3. Collaborative and Strategic Projects

Collaborative and Strategic Projects is flexible funding under IDF-Innovative Solutions Support stream for the purposes of developing and implementing collaborative and strategic projects that promote high level innovation and support for inclusive practice.

As specified in the eligibility requirements (above), the department may consider flexible funding under IDF-Innovative Solutions Support stream to relevant organisations (including ECEC peak bodies, service delivery specialists, disability organisations and other inclusion entities.

Relevant organisations may approach the department with project proposals including a budget that is supported by quotes and a project plan.

The department may engage directly with relevant organisations to solicit proposals in response to identified needs.

When considering proposals, the department will use the assessment criteria for the IDF-Innovative Solutions Support outlined above. Collaborative and Strategic Projects are assessed and approved outside the Inclusion Support Portal solely by the department.

Applications for Collaborative and Strategic Projects can be directed to the department at InclusionSupportProgram@education.gov.au

## 6.4. Rates and limits

There is no specific range or limit for a single application for IDF-Innovative Solutions Support. The Inclusion Development Fund Manager will provide a recommendation to the department, based on the value for money assessment of the proposed application against the criteria. Applicants are encouraged to consider projects costing $10,000 (GST inclusive) or less.

# 7. Inclusion Development Fund - Immediate/Time-Limited Support

Eligible services are:

1. Centre-Based Day Care
2. Outside School Hours Care

Eligible Cohorts are:

- have a diagnosed disability or development delay (including awaiting disability diagnosis)
- are presenting with challenging behaviours
- have a serious medical or health condition, including mental health
- are presenting with trauma-related behaviours.

## 7.1. Description

The IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support provides a significant Commonwealth funding contribution towards the short-term employment of an Additional Educator to support the inclusion of a child with high support needs, including children with or without a disability diagnosis, where there are barriers to participation. The intention of funding is to be highly responsive, providing immediate support while an alternative and more stable solution is being determined, such as the service is embedding the strategies outlined in their Strategic Inclusion Plan and building their capabilities.

IDF-Immediate/Time Limited Support can be approved for up to 12 weeks and can only be approved once for the service, for the same child.

In instances where it is identified that Immediate/Time-Limited Support or other strategies will not be sufficient to build the service's capability and capacity to include a child beyond 12 weeks, then services should apply for IDF-Additional Educator in the first instance. The service provider must demonstrate why Immediate/Time Limited Support is appropriate. In line with the non-approved purposes of funding (4.1.4), IDF-Immediate/Time Limited Support is not designed to fill a gap while the service provider gathers evidence to apply or is awaiting approval for longer-term IDF-Additional Educator. For example, where there is evidence that longer term support is required for a child with a diagnosed disability or awaiting disability diagnosis, services to apply for longer term IDF-Additional Educator instead.

Note: Additional Educators do not provide individual (one-to-one) support for a child who has additional needs, as they work as a team with other educators to include all children within the care environment.

Funding support may be approved to address an immediate barrier or barriers to a child's inclusion, such as helping the service ensure a successful and safe transition for a child into the most appropriate care environment, while enabling the service to support the participation of all children.

For more information refer to non-approved purposes for funding (4.1.4).

# 7.2. Application requirements

## 7.2.1. Development of a Strategic Inclusion Plan and Project Outline

As the intention of this funding is to be highly responsive, the service seeking IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support is not required to complete a Strategic Inclusion Plan at the time of application. The service is however required to develop a short Project Outline in the Inclusion Support Portal, identifying the barriers to inclusion and strategies the service intends to implement with an increased educator to child ratio, for a time-limited period. The application needs to be endorsed by the relevant Inclusion Agency before submitting a request for contribution funding to employ an Additional Educator. The service is required to complete the Strategic Inclusion Plan following the assessment and outcome of their application. Services may already have a Strategic Inclusion Plan in place (that will need to be updated) however the Project Outline is still required to apply for IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support.

## 7.2.2. Documentary evidence

Documentary evidence is not required for IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support.

## 7.2.3. Conditions of Funding

The service must agree to the Conditions of Funding (Appendix 1).

# 7.3. Submitting an application

An application for IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support applies to the service where an inclusion barrier is present. An application may be approved for up to 12 weeks, once, for the service, for the same child.

An application for IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support requires the following information from the service:

- enrolment details of the eligible child
- the days and hours of attendance of the eligible child
- the total number of hours the service requires access to an Additional Educator each week
- the length of the approval period required
- the total number of Additional Educators the service requires; if more than one in the same care environment

- details of whether the service requires access to an Additional Educator for pupil free days the child may attend the service
- the context of the care environment, including the number and ages of children and the number of educators in the environment, including existing IDF-Additional Educators
- the Project Outline, including the immediate barriers to inclusion and the strategies to address the barriers while an alternate and more stable solution is being determined to support the child's longer-term inclusion.

Inclusion Development Fund applications are submitted through the Inclusion Support Portal for assessment by the Inclusion Development Fund Manager. This is done after application requirements have been completed by the service and the application has been endorsed by the Inclusion Agency.

The Inclusion Development Fund Manager will assess applications as per section 10 of these Guidelines.

# 7.4. Rates and limits

| Care Type | Subsidy Rate ($/hour) | Hourly Limit | Approval Period | Weekly Hourly Limit |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Centre-Based Day Care, Outside School Hours Care (before and after school) *** | $23.00 | Up to 150 hours per child | Up to 12 weeks per year, from the approval date | Up to 25 hours per week |
| **Vacation Care** | $23.00 | Up to 150 hours per child | Up to 12 weeks per year, from the approval date | Up to 40 hours per week |

The rates and limits above are the maximum hourly limits and approval periods that apply to a single educator subsidised through a contribution funding by IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support stream.

* Outside School Hours Care (before and after school) are combined.

## 7.4.1. Pupil free days

The service is eligible to apply for IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support where a child on a -Inclusion Development Fund case attends the service on a pupil free day. A maximum of 1 pupil free day, at up to 8 hours per day, can be approved over a 12 week approval period of an IDF-Immediate/Time Limited Support case.

# 8. Inclusion Development Fund - Additional Educator

Eligible services are:

1. Centre-Based Day Care
2. Outside School Hours Care

## 8.1. Description

The IDF-Additional Educator subsidy provides a significant Commonwealth funding contribution towards the longer-term employment of an Additional Educator. This is to increase the educator to child ratios to assist educators to implement inclusive strategies to support the inclusion of a child (or children) with additional needs and ongoing high support needs. Applications for IDF-Additional Educator can be submitted where it's agreed by the Inclusion Agency that other supports available and implemented will not be sufficient to embed capability or capacity of inclusion within the service.

The IDF-Additional Educator is available to support the inclusion of children with ongoing high support needs:

- attending Centre-Based Day Care services, with additional needs:
  - with disability diagnosis or development delay (including awaiting disability diagnosis)

  Where the child is under 6 years of age:
  - presenting with challenging behaviours
  - presenting with trauma related behaviour
  - has a serious medical or health condition, including mental health

- attending Outside School Hours Care services (including Centre-Based Day Care Outside School Hours Care programs), with additional needs:
  - with a disability diagnosis
  - awaiting disability diagnosis (with a current and ongoing assessment for disability diagnosis).

As a capped program, in the event demand exceeds the available annual budget, funding will be prioritised in the following order:

- children with a diagnosed disability
- children awaiting disability diagnosis
- other children with additional needs.

Note: Additional Educators do not provide individual (one-to-one) support for a child who has additional needs, as they work as a team with other educators to meet the needs of all children within the care environment.

For more information refer to non-approved purposes for funding (4.1.4).

# 8.2. Application requirements

## 8.2.1. Development of a Strategic Inclusion Plan

The service must complete a Strategic Inclusion Plan in the Inclusion Support Portal, in collaboration with its Inclusion Agency before applying for the IDF-Additional Educator. Where the Strategic Inclusion Plan identifies a barrier to inclusion for which an Additional Educator is the most appropriate solution, the Inclusion Agency can support the service by endorsing their application for funding.

## 8.2.2. Provision of documentary evidence

The service must attach the documentary evidence provided by the parent or carer, in the Inclusion Support Portal.

## 8.2.3. Provision of Permission to Share Personal Information Form

The service must attach the correct, completed and signed permission to share personal information consent form provided by the parent or carer, in the Inclusion Support Portal.

## 8.2.4. Conditions of Funding

The service must agree to the Conditions of Funding (Appendix 1).

# 8.3. Submitting an application

An application for IDF-Additional Educator applies to the care environment where an inclusion barrier (or barriers) is present and where it's agreed by the Inclusion Agency that other supports available and implemented will not be sufficient to embed capability or capacity of inclusion within the service.

If the service is seeking IDF-Additional Educator for children across different care environments, separate applications are required. An application can be approved for up to 52 weeks. An application for IDF-Additional Educator requires the following information from the service:

- documentary evidence and enrolment details of the eligible child (or children)
- the days and hours of attendance of the eligible child (or children)
- the total number of hours the service requires access to an Additional Educator each week
- the total number of Additional Educators the service requires; if more than one in the same care environment
- details of whether the service requires access to an Additional Educator for pupil free days the child (or children) may attend the service
- the context of the care environment, including the number and ages of children and the number of educators in the environment

- the inclusion profile and inclusion planning, including the current barriers to inclusion and the strategies and actions to address the barriers for the care environment (provided in the Strategic Inclusion Plan).

Inclusion Development Fund applications are submitted through the Inclusion Support Portal for assessment by the Inclusion Development Fund Manager. This is done after the application requirements have been completed by the service and the application has been endorsed by the Inclusion Agency.

The Inclusion Development Fund Manager will assess applications as per section 10 of these Guidelines.

# 8.4. Rates and Limits

| Care Type | Care Arrangement | Subsidy Rate ($/hour) | Hourly Limit | Approval Period |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Centre-Based Day Care, Outside School Hours Care (before and after school)** | Single child | $23.00 | Up to 25 hours per week | Up to 52 weeks |
| | Shared care (more than one child) | $23.00 | Up to 40 hours per week | Up to 52 weeks |
| **Vacation Care** | Single child | $23.00 | Up to 40 hours per week | Up to 12 weeks |
| | Shared care (more than one child) | $23.00 | Up to 50 hours per week | Up to 12 weeks |

The rates and limits above are the maximum hourly limits and approval periods that apply to a single educator subsidised through a contribution funding for IDF-Additional Educator stream.

## 8.4.1. Pupil free days

The Service is eligible to apply for the IDF-Additional Educator where a child (or children) on a Inclusion Development Fund case attends the service on a pupil free day. A maximum of 6 pupil free days, at up to 8 hours per day can be approved over a 52 week approval period of an IDF-Additional Educator case.

## 8.5. Shared care arrangements

Where more than one child with additional and ongoing high support needs is in attendance in the same care environment, the service can explore the use of a shared care arrangement. A shared care arrangement occurs where one Additional Educator is employed to increase the educator to child ratio to enable all educators to support the inclusion of more than one child with additional and ongoing high support needs in the care environment.

When completing the Inclusion Development Fund application, the service, in collaboration with its Inclusion Agency, will determine if a shared care arrangement could meet the service's needs. Where a shared care arrangement occurs, the service is eligible for an increased number of contribution funding hours for an Additional Educator.

## 8.6. Changes to the care environment

If there are significant changes to the care environment which may impact the level of support required compared to the existing IDF-Additional Educator case, the service must submit a change of circumstances application, within 15 business days, following the processes outlined in these guidelines.

Changes to the care environment may include situations, (but not limited to) where:

- a child on an approved Inclusion Development Fund case leaves the service
- the child on an approved Inclusion Development Fund case increases or decreases their hours of attendance in the care environment
- more support from an Additional Educator is required due to the enrolment of an additional child with additional and ongoing high support needs
- significant staffing changes, which may result in a loss of inclusion capabilities in the care environment
- there is a change to the educator to child ratio in the care environment compared to the ratio in the previous application, or there is a significant reduction or increase in the numbers of children attending the care environment.

The service, in collaboration with its Inclusion Agency, must review:

- the Strategic Inclusion Plan and inclusion profile of the care environment
- whether additional support of an Additional Educator is still required to address the barriers to inclusion through increasing the educator to child ratios to implement the strategies in the Strategic Inclusion Plan.

When a child on an approved IDF-Additional Educator case, moves into a different care environment within the service; the service, in collaboration with its Inclusion Agency, must review the Strategic Inclusion Plan and inclusion profile of the different care environment to determine if an Additional Educator is required in the new environment and if so, determine the level of support needed.

Where support for IDF-Additional Educator is required for the different care environment, a new application, or change of circumstances application for the new care environment must be submitted following the processes outlined in these guidelines. Where an extension is required, the service can apply to extend the case.

# 9. Inclusion Development Fund - Family Day Care (FDC) Top Up

Eligible services are:

1. Family Day Care

## 9.1. Description

The IDF-FDC Top Up supports eligible Family Day Care services to include children with additional and ongoing high support needs by compensating the educator for reduced enrolment capacity, by way of a Top Up payment. The funding recognises that including a child with ongoing high support needs may result in the educator being unable to enrol the maximum number of children permitted under the National Law, due to the significant additional support the child requires from the educator, over and above what would be expected for children of a similar age in the care environment.

The IDF-FDC Top Up is a financial supplement to offset the income impact of this reduced capacity. It must not be used to enable the educator to increase their enrolments back to, or towards, the maximum number of children permitted under the National Law (refer to Section 4.1.4 for non-approved purposes of funding).

## 9.2. Application requirements

### 9.2.1. Development of a Strategic Inclusion Plan

The Family Day Care service must complete a Strategic Inclusion Plan in the Inclusion Support Portal, in collaboration with its Inclusion Agency, before applying for IDF-FDC Top Up. If through the development of a Strategic Inclusion Plan and review of the children attending, it can be demonstrated that including a child with additional and ongoing high support needs results in the Family Day Care educator being unable to enrol the maximum number of children allowed under the National Law, the Strategic Inclusion Plan will support the service's application for funding.

### 9.2.2. Provision of documentary evidence

The service must attach the documentary evidence, provided by the parent or carer, in the Inclusion Support Portal.

### 9.2.3. Provision of Permission to Share Personal Information Form

The service must attach the correct, completed and signed permission to share personal information, provided by the parent or carer, in the Inclusion Support Portal.

### 9.2.4. Conditions of Funding

The Service must agree to the Conditions of Funding (Appendix 1).

## 9.3. Submitting an application

An application for IDF-FDC Top Up applies to the Family Day Care educator where the inclusion of a child results in the educator being unable to enrol the maximum number of children as allowed under the National Law. If the Family Day Care service is seeking IDF-FDC Top Up for children across different Family Day Care educators, separate applications are required. An application can be approved for up to 52 weeks.

An application for IDF-FDC Top Up is in the context of the Family Day Care educator. An application for IDF-FDC Top Up requires the following information from the service:

- documentary evidence and enrolment details of the eligible child (or children)
- the days and hours of attendance of the eligible child (or children)
- the total number of hours the service requires IDF-FDC Top Up
- details of whether the service will require support for pupil free days the child (or children) may attend the service
- the context of the care environment, including the number and ages of children in the care environment
- the inclusion profile and inclusion planning, including the current barriers to inclusion and the strategies and actions to address the barriers for the care environment (provided in the Strategic Inclusion Plan).

IDF-FDC Top Up applications are submitted through the Inclusion Support Portal for assessment by the Inclusion Development Fund Manager. This is done after the application requirements have been completed by the service and the application has been endorsed by the Inclusion Agency.

The Inclusion Development Fund Manager will assess applications as per section 10 of these Guidelines.

# 9.4. Rates and limits

| Care Type | Subsidy Rate ($/hour) | Hourly Limit | Approval Period |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Family Day Care** | $14.08/hour (2026-27) | Up to 50 hours per week | Up to 52 weeks per year |

## 9.4.1. Pupil free days

Family Day Care services are eligible to apply for IDF-FDC Top Up where a child (or children) on a Inclusion Development Fund case, with that service, attends on a pupil free day. A maximum of 6 pupil free days, at up to 8 hours per day, can be approved over a 52 week approval period of an Inclusion Development Fund case.

# 10. Assessment and outcome of applications

## 10.1. Assessment of applications

The Inclusion Development Fund Manager will assess the service's application for funding under each Inclusion Development Fund stream against the eligibility requirements as per these guidelines and service providers will be notified of the outcome of the application.

IDF-Innovative Solutions Support stream has its own distinct assessment criteria. The Inclusion Development Fund Manager will consider the assessment criteria in their assessment of the service's application.

Prior to a funding application for IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support or IDF-Additional Educator being considered, the Inclusion Development Fund Manager will determine whether the service meets the educator to child ratios as required under the National Regulations (or relevant state or territory legislation). This is to ensure the adequate supervision of children already exists within the particular care environment for which Inclusion Development Fund support is requested. Where National Regulations for educator to child ratios are not met, applications will be deemed ineligible.

The Inclusion Development Fund Manager considers the following in their assessment of the application for IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support, IDF-Additional Educator and IDF-FDC Top Up:

- the additional needs of the child (or children) (including requirements for ongoing high support needs for IDF-Additional Educator and IDF-FDC Top Up)
- the details of the barrier (or barriers) to inclusion presented in the care environment, identified (through the Project Outline and Strategic Inclusion Plan)
- the degree to which an Additional Educator for a short or longer term is the most appropriate solution to the identified inclusion barrier (or barriers) (applicable only to IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support and IDF-Additional Educator)
- how the requested Additional Educator will be used to implement strategies to address inclusion barriers and facilitate inclusion of all children (applicable only to IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support and IDF-Additional Educator)
- whether the impact on the educator of including the child with ongoing high support needs results in the educator being unable to enrol the maximum number of children as allowed under National Law (applicable only to IDF-FDC Top Up)
- any other inclusion support provided to the service for the same care environment
- whether the application has been endorsed or not by the Inclusion Agency.

Applications for urgent IDF-Innovative Solutions Support and IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support will be processed and the service notified of the outcome typically within 5 business days of complete application receipt.





Applications for routine IDF-Innovative Solutions Support, IDF-Additional Educator and IDF-FDC Top Up, by will be processed and the service notified of the outcome typically within 15 business days of complete application receipt.

# 10.2. Outcome of application

## 10.2.1. Application Not Approved

If an application is not approved, the Inclusion Development Fund Manager will send the service an Non Approval Letter via email advising that the application has been not approved and the rationale for which it was declined. Information about communication processes, including complaints mechanisms and appeals processes (applicable only to ECEC services) is available on the Inclusion Development Fund Manager's website, which can be accessed through the department's website.

## 10.2.2. IDF-Innovative Solutions Support

If an application for IDF-Innovative Solutions Support is approved by the department, the Inclusion Development Fund Manager will send the service a Letter of Offer via email outlining:

- description of the project
- total funding approved
- expected end date of the project
- expected deliverables of the project
- any additional terms and conditions.

The service must accept and sign the Letter of Offer, returning it to the Inclusion Development Fund Manager via email, within 15 business days, before funding can be provided. Offers that are not signed and returned within the specified timeframe will be deemed void.

## 10.2.3. Application Approved

If an application for IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support, IDF-Additional Educator or IDF-FDC Top Up is approved by the department, the service will be sent an Approval Letter via email outlining the:

- start and end date of the approval period
- approved number of contribution funding hours that can be claimed each week
- maximum number of contribution funding hours over the approval period
- approved number of non-face-to-face hours

The service is not required to formally accept the Approval Letter, however submitting claims consistent with the Approval Letter indicates acceptance of funding and the Conditions of Funding (Appendix 1).

# 11. Program payments

## 11.1. Claiming the Inclusion Development Fund

Services receive payment for IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support and IDF-Additional Educator by submitting claims for up to the maximum weekly approved hours on the Inclusion Development Fund case. To claim, the Additional Educator must be employed as the Additional Educator and the following circumstances apply:

- the eligible child (children) was physically in attendance (for all or part of a session) for the actual hours of care provided by the Additional Educator or
- if the eligible child (children) were unexpectantly absent and the educator attended, a service may claim up to the approved IDF non face to face hours of the session of care (see non face to face below)

Claims for IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support and IDF-Additional Educator require services to:

- identify the Additional Educator
- outline the hours the Additional Educator attended the care environment
- provide details of the eligible child (or children) in the care environment, including their enrolment and attendance records.

Claims for IDF-FDC Top Up are based on the child's attendance. Claims require services to identify the number of hours they are claiming the IDF-FDC Top Up payment each week.

Claims for IDF are made retrospectively via the service's child care software or the Inclusion Support Portal. You will receive payment for the IDF for an Additional Educator retrospectively. Your claim will be matched with the child (children) session data submitted for the purposes of Child Care Subsidy (CCS). IDF-Innovative Solutions Support payments are made in full, upon approval.

Services must also adhere to the Conditions of Funding in relation to claims. The service must submit claims within 60 days of the fortnight the child listed on the approved case attended the service. If the service does not submit any claims for more than 60 days during the approved period, the Inclusion Development Fund case will automatically be deactivated and new claims cannot be submitted. Cases may be reactivated by the Inclusion Development Fund Manager, with evidence of a valid reason why the claim could not be made within the specified timeframe. If reactivated, eligible claims can only be made for weeks within the 60 day period. Cases cannot be reactivated, or claims submitted or resubmitted, including cancelled or rejected claims, if the case has ended and 60 days have passed.

The service must also retain relevant evidence of the eligible child (or children) on the Inclusion Development Fund case and the Additional Educator attendance records.

### 11.1.1. Non face-to-face hours

Where a child is unexpectedly absent from the service, the educator funded by IDF-Immediate/ Time-Limited Support or IDF-Additional Educator should receive appropriate notice in line with award (or Enterprise Agreement) provisions. The service is able to claim the IDF contribution funding for a limited number of hours during its approval period, where the child is absent, but the Additional Educator attends the care environment as set out below (evidence may be required or requested to validate).

For IDF-FDC Top Up, a capped number of non-face-to face hours will be available per Inclusion Development Fund case. This will allow the service to claim IDF-FDC Top Up where the child has unexpectedly not attended.

The maximum number of hours for which the contribution funding is payable where a child is absent is a percentage of the total number of approved hours in the service's approved period, as set out in the table below. Once the service has exceeded this number of hours in its approval period, it will not receive any more funding for further hours that the child is absent from the service and where the educator funded by IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support or IDF-Additional Educator attends.

Note: public holidays, children's planned absences and service closures are not considered absences for non face-to-face purposes.

| Application | Care type | Non face-to-face hours limit (of total IDF case hours) |
|---|---|---|
| **IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support** | All service types | 10% |
| **IDF-Additional Educator** | Centre-Based Day Care | 4% |
| | Outside School Hours Care | 5% |
| | Vacation Care | 17% |
| **IDF-Family Day Care Top Up** | Family Day Care | 10% |

Example 1 - A Centre-Based Day Care service is approved for IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support for 100 hours. The maximum number of hours it can claim for in the approval period, where the child is absent but the Additional Educator attends is 10% of the total approved hours (100 hours x 0.10 Non Face-to-Face hours limit = 10 hours)

Example 2 - A Centre-Based Day Care service is approved for IDF-Additional Educator for 18 hours per week for 52 weeks. The maximum number of hours it can claim for in the approval period, where the child is absent but the Additional Educator attends is 4% of the total approval period (18 hours x 52 weeks x 0.04 Non Face-to-Face hours limit = 37.4 hours)

Example 3 - A Family Day Care service is approved for IDF-FDC Top Up Payment for 18 hours per week for 52 weeks. The maximum number of hours it can claim for in the approval period, where the child is absent is 10% of the total approval period (18 hours x 52 weeks x 0.10 Non Face-to-Face hours limit = 93.6 hours)

# 11.2. Payment of the Inclusion Development Fund

The Inclusion Development Fund payment is paid from the department directly to the service, to the same payee details it has nominated to receive its Child Care Subsidy payments on behalf of families.

For IDF-FDC Top Up, the Family Day Care service is required to pass the payment directly on to the relevant Family Day Care educator.

For IDF-Innovation Solutions Support, payment is paid up front, inclusive of Goods and Services Tax (GST), after the Letter of Offer has been formally executed by the department upon return of the signed Letter of Offer. Retrospective claiming is not required unless otherwise stated in the Letter of Offer.

This GST inclusive payment is irrespective of whether the goods and/or services supplied to the ECEC service is inclusive of GST or not. If there is a GST exclusive component, the ECEC service would need to remit that amount back to ATO through their usual Business Activity Statement arrangements. Prior to September 2023, for ECEC services not registered for GST, manual payments could be made by the Inclusion Development Fund Manager.

Following a successfully executed claim, the service will typically receive payment within 4-6 business days, depending on the banking institution to which it is affiliated.

## 11.2.1. Acquittal of IDF-Innovative Solutions Support

At the completion of the project, determined as the end date outlined in the Letter of Offer, the service must complete a declaration, declaring that funding was expended for the purposes for which it was approved. Services must acquit only those funds that have been expended for the specific purposes for which they were approved. Any funds not acquitted must be returned to the department. The service must also provide details of the outcomes of the project, including confirmation that intended deliverables were achieved, and if necessary, an explanation for why they were not achieved.

If the service is unable to acquit the total funding allocated to the specific project, the service may propose, in writing, alternative inclusion activities for the remaining funds to address the inclusion barriers, in consultation with their Inclusion Agency. Department approval must be sought and

provided in writing, before remaining funds can be used. Request should include endorsement by the Inclusion Agency and clearly demonstrate how the proposed activities support inclusion.

## 11.3. Review, extension and/or renewal of funding

The IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support can only be approved once for the service, for the same child. If the service requires ongoing support from an Additional Educator to include the child with additional needs, as identified by its Project Outline and/or Strategic Inclusion Plan, it should apply for IDF-Additional Educator in the first instance.

Where an extension would be the most practical or expedient option (for example, if a child with additional needs is changing care environments or transitioning to school), the service can apply to extend the case for a maximum period of 12 weeks for the current care environment. (Excluding IDF-Immediate/Time-Limited Support)

The service can apply for a renewal of their approved IDF-Additional Educator or IDF-FDC Top Up case. The service, in collaboration with its Inclusion Agency, must review:

- the Strategic Inclusion Plan and care environment
- whether ongoing IDF-Additional Educator is required
- whether there is a change in the number of hours an Additional Educator is needed.

A new application, which indicates it is for renewal of funding for a care environment on a previously approved case, must be submitted following the processes outlined in these guidelines.

The service must notify the Inclusion Development Fund Manager if the approved amount of Inclusion Development Fund is no longer required.

There is no explicit limit on the number of applications the service can make to IDF-Innovative Solutions Support, however the Inclusion Development Fund Manager will use discretion when assessing applications and may prioritise support to services that have not yet accessed IDF-Innovative Solutions Support over the service that has received previous support.





# Appendix 1. Conditions of Funding

## A1.1. IDF-Innovative Solutions Support

Service providers must comply with the guidelines. This includes (but not limited to):

- Using the funding for the purposes as stated in the Letter of Offer sent by the Inclusion Development Fund Manager
- Retaining all relevant documentation to support the spending of approved funds
- Complying with the Privacy Act 1988 and Australian Privacy Principles when handling personal information for the purposes of the program
- For service projects, completing an online declaration (acquittal) of funding expenditure on completion of the project, and report on outcomes of the project in the Inclusion Support Portal
- For Collaborative and Strategic Projects, completion of acquittal requirements as set out in the funding agreement. Service providers must acquit only those funds that have been expended for the specific purposes for which they were approved
- Advising the Inclusion Development Fund Manager in writing within 30 days of any intention of the service provider to change owner and/or operator. Both the existing operator and the new operator are required to advise the Inclusion Development Fund Manager of the change (within 30 days) and take the necessary actions required to ensure service continuity, if Inclusion Development Funding support is needed
- Complete an online declaration of funding expenditure and report on project outcomes through the Inclusion Support Portal. This must be submitted within 15 business days of the project end date or within 15 business days of the end date of the Approval Period
- Meeting all reasonable requests from the Inclusion Development Fund Manager or department to undertake compliance activity where appropriate, including reasonable assistance to provide materials relevant to the IDF-Innovative Solutions Support
- Meeting all reasonable requests from the Inclusion Development Fund Manager or department to participate in reporting and evaluation activities for the program
- Complying with all relevant statutes, regulations, by-laws and requirements of any Commonwealth, State, Territory or local authority, and any of the department's policies notified in writing.

Service providers found to be in breach of any of these conditions, may be required to repay any amounts of funding received whilst in breach.

## A1.2. IDF-Immediate/Time Limited Support, IDF-Additional Educator and IDF-FDC Top Up

Service providers must comply with the guidelines. This includes (but not limited to):

- Use of the funding for the purposes as stated in the Approval Letter
- Ensuring adequate supervision and maintaining the required educator-to-child ratios outlined in the National Regulations. The Additional Educator approval is to exceed the minimum regulatory standards
- Ensure the Additional Educator engaged in the care environment under the Inclusion Development Fund does not provide one-to-one support for individual children

- Where funding is approved through an FDC Top-Up application, the additional funding is to support inclusion needs and must not be used to enable an FDC educator to operate at the maximum child capacity permitted under the National Law
- Implementing the Strategic Inclusion Plan with regular review (within a 12 month period) and updates to address the barriers to inclusion and assist in embedding inclusive practices at the service
- Submitting online claims for Inclusion Development Fund payments within 60 days of the fortnight that the child (or children) on the approved Inclusion Development Fund case, attended the service. If the service provider does not submit and claims for more than 60 days during the approval period, the Inclusion Development Fund case will automatically be deactivated and new claims cannot be submitted
- Retaining relevant evidence pertaining to the use of the funding, including attendance records of the eligible child (or children) on the approved Inclusion Development Fund Case, Additional Educator attendance or record of payment to the Family Day Care educator
- Complying with the *Privacy Act* 1988 and the Australian Privacy Principles when handling personal information for the purposes of the Inclusion Support Program
- Advising the Inclusion Development Fund Manager via the Inclusion Support Portal within 15 business days if the child (or children) on the approved Inclusion Development Fund case no longer attends the service
- Advising the Inclusion Development Fund Manager in writing within 30 days of any intention of the service provider to change owner and/or operator. Both the existing operator and the new operator are required to advise the Inclusion Development Fund Manager of the change (within 30 days) and take the necessary actions required to ensure service continuity, if Inclusion Development Funding support is needed
- Meeting all reasonable requests from the Inclusion Development Fund Manager or department to undertake compliance activity where appropriate, including reasonable assistance to provide materials relevant to the Inclusion Development Fund
- Meeting all reasonable requests from the Inclusion Development Fund Manager or department to participate in reporting and evaluation activities for the program
- Complying with all relevant statutes, regulations, by-laws and requirements of any Commonwealth, State, Territory or local authority, and any of the department's policies notified in writing.

If service providers are found to be in breach of any of the conditions, the approved Inclusion Development Fund case(s) may be terminated, future claims may not be able to be submitted and payments may be withheld. Service providers may also be required to repay any amounts received whilst in breach.

# Appendix 2. Other legislative requirements

## A2.1. Privacy

All parties involved in delivering the program are bound by the provisions of the *Privacy Act 1988* ("the *Privacy Act*"). The *Privacy Act* contains the Australian Information Privacy Principles (APPs) which regulate the handling of personal information of individuals by government agencies and certain private sector organisations, including the collection, storage, use and disclosure of that information.

Persons, bodies and organisations involved in the program must comply with the APPs when handling personal information collected for the purposes of that program. In brief, persons, bodies and organisations must ensure that:

- personal information is managed in an open and transparent way including by having a clearly expressed and up to date APP privacy policy
- individuals are given the option, where practicable, of not identifying themselves, or of using a pseudonym
- personal information, both solicited and unsolicited, is collected in accordance with APPs 3 and 4, and sensitive information is afforded a higher degree of protection
- individuals are appropriately notified of certain matters at the time their personal information is collected
- personal information is only used and disclosed for the purposes for which it was collected or for other purposes in accordance with APP 6, and only disclosed outside Australia in accordance with APP 8
- records containing personal information are accurate, relevant, up-to-date, complete and not misleading
- suitable security arrangements exist for all records containing personal information
- access to a person's own personal information held by the organisation is made available in accordance with APP 12 and
- requests for correction of an individual's personal information are dealt with in accordance with APP 13.

For further information about the department's privacy policy, including how to access or correct personal information held by the department or how to make a privacy complaint, please go to our website: www.education.gov.au/privacy or contact privacy@education.gov.au

Privacy complaints may be made directly to the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner, but will only be actioned where the complaint was made to the department in the first instance but was not dealt with to the complainant's satisfaction.

## A2.2. Freedom of Information (FOI)

All documents created or held by the department in relation to the program are subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* ("the *FOI Act*").

If a request is made under the FOI Act for access to a document subject to the *FOI Act*, then that document will be made publicly available unless it can be demonstrated that the document falls under an exemption provision, or a conditional exemption provision and disclosure would, on balance, be contrary to the public interest, as specified in the FOI Act.

Please note, the FOI Act also applies to some documents created or held by the department's contractors or subcontractors who provide services to the public or third parties on behalf of the department. Therefore, if the department receives a request for access to a document held by a contractor or a subcontractor, the department is required to take action to obtain a copy of the document from its contractor or subcontractor (as applicable) and then decide whether access is to be given to the document under the FOI Act.

For further information about the department's FOI, including how make a freedom of information request please go to our website: www.education.gov.au/FOI or contact FOI@education.gov.au

Any decision regarding an FOI request must be made by an authorised FOI decision-maker within the department and in accordance with the requirements of the *FOI Act*.

Note: The FOI Act defines the term 'document' broadly and includes, amongst other things, any paper or other material on which there is writing, maps, plans, drawings, photographs, electronic records, sound recordings, images, records of information and copies.

## A2.3. Compliance with Laws and Policies

People who do business with the department are required to comply with all relevant laws and policies and failure to do so will breach their contract or funding agreement (as the case may be) with the department and may be a breach of the law.

## A2.4. Discrimination

The program must be administered in a way that supports the principle of non-discrimination. Under the Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031, barriers which prevent people with disabilities having access to programs and services must be removed. ISP contractors or recipients may be subject to the provisions of the following Acts, which are designed to prevent discriminatory practices:

- *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*;
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*;
- *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986; and*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*.

## A2.5. Unlawful Disclosure of Information – Crimes Act 1914

ISP contractors should be aware of section 122.4 of the *Criminal Code*, which relates to the unauthorised disclosure of information by current and former Commonwealth officers and makes such unauthorised disclosure an offence punishable by 2 years imprisonment. Section 122.4 applies

to persons who are, or were Commonwealth officers, or who are or were engaged to perform work for a Commonwealth entity.

## A2.6. False and misleading information – Criminal Code

Individuals and service providers applying for program support should be familiar with Part 7.4 of the *Criminal Code*, and in particular with section 136.1, which makes it an offence to make a false or misleading statement as part of an application. This is an offence punishable by 12 months imprisonment.

## A2.7. Working with Children

Contractors and recipients, who, as part of the program, come into contact with children are required to undergo a relevant police and/or working with children check and comply with any relevant state and territory law relating to working with children and vulnerable people.
All Persons with Management or Control (PMCs) must also hold working with children check.

## A2.8. Fraud

The department is committed to preventing fraud in all aspects of its business. ISP contractors or recipients are required to promptly notify the department's Fraud Control and Intelligence Team, at email: fraud@education.gov.au, of any suspected fraud and provide details. ISP contractors or recipients and their staff must not engage in fraudulent activity in relation to their contract. They must take all reasonable steps to prevent fraud upon the Commonwealth in relation to the services or funding, including the implementation of an appropriate fraud-control plan, a copy of which must be provided to the department if requested.

## A2.9. Information Technology Security

ISP contractors and recipients who have access to departmental IT systems must have a unique log-on ID and password, which must be kept secure and must not be shared under any circumstances. During the application process for access to departmental IT systems, all potential users will be required to provide sufficient personal information to allow them to be identified. This is to ensure that applicants who have been found to have fraudulently used the department's IT systems in the past can be identified and denied access.

## A2.10. Recordkeeping

In accordance with the *Archives Act 1983,* ISP contractors and ECEC service providers are required to:

- store all Commonwealth records in a secure location which is not accessible by unauthorised persons and
- retain all Commonwealth records for a minimum period of seven years from the date the last action was completed.

In addition, financial records must be kept in accordance with accounting standards.

Contracts and agreements formed under the Inclusion Support Program will contain more detailed information about these requirements.

# Appendix 3. Resources and links to relevant programs

## A3.1. Resources

| Organisation | Website link |
|---|---|
| ACECQA - National Regulations | https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-01/NQF-Resource-02-Guide-to-ECS-Law-Regs.pdf |
| ACECQA - Approved Learning Frameworks (ALFs) | https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-law-regulations/approved-learning-frameworks |
| ARACY – Australian Research alliance for children and Youth | Welcome to ARACY - Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) |
| Best practice in Early childhood intervention | https://www.eciavic.org.au/documents/item/1419 |
| Department of Education | https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood |
| Department of Education Inclusion Support Program | https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/inclusion-support-program |
| Department of Education Inclusion in early childhood | https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/about/national-quality-framework/inclusion |
| Department of Education Child Care Provider Handbook | https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/resources/child-care-provider-handbook |
| Department of Social Security - Recognised Disability | http://guides.dss.gov.au/guide-social-security-law/1/1/r/90 |
| *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) | https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2004A04426/2018-04-12/text |
| Disability Standards for Education (DSE) | Disability Standards for Education 2005 - Department of Education, Australian Government |
| Early Childhood Australia - Statement on Inclusion | https://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Statement-of-Inclusion-2016.pdf |
| Family Assistance Law | Family Assistance Law - Department of Education, Australian Government |
| Inclusion Agencies | https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/inclusion-support-program/inclusion-agencies |
| Inclusion Development Fund Manager | https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/providers/extra-support/inclusion-support-program/inclusion-development-fund |

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| National Disability Insurance Scheme NDIS | https://ourguidelines.ndis.gov.au/how-ndis-supports-work-menu/mainstream-and-community-supports/who-responsible-supports-you-need/early-childhood-development |
| NDIS – Early Childhood Partners | https://www.ndis.gov.au/understanding/families-and-carers/early-childhood-approach-children-younger-9/connecting-early-childhood-partner |
| NDIS | https://ourguidelines.ndis.gov.au/home/becoming-participant/applying-ndis/what-about-children-younger-6-developmental-delay |
| UN *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. | https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf |
| UN *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* | https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/united-nations-convention-rights-persons-disabilities-uncrpd |
| United Nations (UN) *Convention on the Rights of the Child* | https://www.unicef.org.au/united-nations-convention-on-the-rights-of-the-child |
| UNESCO - Policy guidelines on inclusion in education | https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000177849 |
| Universal Declaration of Human Rights - Article 26 | Universal Declaration of Human Rights - Human rights at your fingertips - Human rights at your fingertips \| Australian Human Rights Commission |
| Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework | veyldframework.pdf (education.vic.gov.au) |

## A3.2. In Home Care

In Home Care supports families' workforce participation and ECEC requirements where other approved services are not available or suitable, particularly for families with complex and challenging needs, as well as families who are geographically isolated from child care or work non-standard hours. Families unable to access Centre-based Day Care, Family Day Care or Outside School Hours Care services due to their unique circumstances may be able to access ECEC provided in the family home through In Home Care.

Positive outcomes for families have been observed when there is engagement of the Inclusion Agency and In Home Care Support Agency working collaboratively and utilising networks of both agencies.

## A3.3. Other relevant programs may include;

- Settlement Service Providers
- Adult Migrant English Program Providers
- Migrant Resource Centres
- Indigenous Organisations.

# Glossary

| Word/Phrase | Definition |
|---|---|
| **Approved CCS - ECEC Service Provider** | An approved Child Care Subsidy (CCS) early childhood education and care (ECEC) service provider is a service that has been assessed as satisfying the eligibility rules under the Family Assistance Law and has been approved to administer Australian Government child care payments on behalf of families. See Centre-Based Day Care, Family Day Care and Outside School Hours Care |
| **Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA)** | An independent national body which manages the National Quality Framework (NQF) and works with all governments to provide guidance, resources and services to support the ECEC sector to improve outcomes for children |
| **Additional Educator** | Additional Educators are employed to increase the educator-to-child ratio in the care environment above the licensing requirements, thereby assisting services to include children with additional needs alongside their peers. Educators work as a team, including the Additional Educator, to meet the needs of all children within the care environment. The Additional Educator engaged under the program is not providing one-to-one support for individual children and must meet the requirements of relevant legislation |
| **Awaiting disability diagnosis** | Steps are currently being taken to obtain a diagnosis. Documentary evidence shows that there is current action being taken to assess the child for disability, e.g., referral and appointment for a paediatric developmental assessment due to concerns about a child's development |
| **Barriers** | A barrier is something that is impacting the service's ability to include children with additional needs alongside their typically developing peers. Barriers can be child specific such as physical or social limitations; related to educator skills, knowledge and confidence or team work, family related such as expectations or difficulties with engagement; related to the physical environment or the program structure, including experiences offered and routines |
| **Centre-Based Day Care (CBDC)** | A type of early childhood education and care (ECEC) that has been assessed as CCS approved. Centre-Based Day care (CBDC) provides care for children who have not commenced formal schooling, typically birth to five years old |
| **Care Environment** | A specific setting, room or grouping of children in early childhood education and care services (for example, an educator's home in Family Day Care or a 0-2 year old room in Centre-Based Day Care) |
| **Early Years Learning Framework** | Belonging Being and Becoming - The Early Years Learning Framework describes the principles, practices and outcomes that support and enhance young children's learning from birth to five years of age, as well as their transition to school. It is a key component of the National Quality Framework |

| Word/Phrase | Definition |
|---|---|
| **Educator** | Early childhood educators who work directly with children in early childhood education and care settings |
| **Family Assistance Law** | The legal basis for the Australian Government to provide child care fee assistance, and for the approval of early childhood education and care providers to administer child care fee assistance on behalf of families. The primary legislation is: A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999 and A New Tax System (Family Assistance) (Administration) Act 1999 |
| **Family Day Care (FDC)** | A type of early childhood education and care (ECEC) that has been assessed as CCS approved. Provided in the home of an educator. Family Day Care is a service type distinct from other in-home care arrangements |
| **Inclusion Agency** | Agencies contracted by the Australian Government to help early childhood education and care providers make their services more inclusive for children with additional needs |
| **Inclusion Development Fund** | Funding available to assist eligible early childhood education and care service providers to address a barrier to inclusion that cannot be addressed through the support of an Inclusion Agency |
| **Inclusion Development Fund Manager** | The single national organisation that assesses all applications for all Inclusion Development Fund streams from eligible early childhood education and care services |
| **Inclusion Support Portal** | The Inclusion Support Portal is an online system for lodging Inclusion Development Fund applications and claims for payment |
| **ISP Contractors** | Organisation in receipt of funding from the Australian Government for the delivery of the Inclusion Support Program:<br>Inclusion Agencies (IAs)<br>Inclusion Development Fund Manager (IDFM) |
| **National Law and National Regulations** | Refers to the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 and the Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011, which set a national standard for children's education and care across Australia. In effect, the same law is applied in each state and territory, but with some variation for the needs of each state or territory. References to the National Law includes the Education and Care Services National Law (WA) Act 2012. See www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-law-regulations |
| **National Quality Framework** | A jointly governed uniform national approach to the regulation and quality assessment of education and care services including: a national legislative framework that consists of the National Law and National Regulations; a National Quality Standard; and an assessment and rating system. See www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/about |
| **National Quality Standard** | The National Quality Standard (NQS) sets a national benchmark for ECEC service provision in Australia. The NQS includes 7 quality areas that are important outcomes for |

| Word/Phrase | Definition |
|---|---|
| | children. Services are assessed and rated by their regulatory authority against the NQS, and given a rating for each of the 7 quality areas and an overall rating based on these results |
| **Ongoing High Support Needs** | A child (or children) with **ongoing high support needs** requires significant additional support from educators, which is over and above what would be expected for a child of similar age. Consideration is given to the educator to child ratios provided under the National Regulations for that age group |
| **Outside School Hours Care (OSHC)** | A type of early childhood education and care (ECEC) that has been assessed that has been assessed as CCS approved. Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) provides care for children outside normal school or preschool hours. This includes on a day a child would usually attend, but the school or preschool is not operating, such as pupil free days, school or preschool holidays. OSHC can be Before School Care, After School Care and Vacation Care |
| **National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)** | The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) funds a range of supports and services for NDIS participants. The NDIS is Australia's first national Scheme for people with disability. It provides funding directly to individuals |
| **Pupil free day** | A day set by an educational institution where students do not attend school due to teacher training. Also known as multi-purpose day, curriculum day or professional development day |
| **Specialist Equipment** | Equipment recommended as necessary for the inclusion of the eligible child with ongoing high support needs |
| **Strategic Inclusion Plan** | The Strategic Inclusion Plan is an inclusion assessment and planning tool developed by early childhood education and care services with support of an Inclusion Agency. It includes strategies and actions for improving and embedding inclusive practice for all children including children with additional needs |
| **Typically Developing Peers** | In ECEC Services children are predominately grouped according to chronological age. It is not the child who is required to further develop or change, in order to be included in a care environment with their peers. It is the services role to provide a program that fosters the development and provides opportunities for engagement for all children |