

Review of the loading for students with disability 2019–public submission

Youth Off The Streets

Stakeholder type: Approved authority/school

Jurisdiction: New South Wales

Summary

Youth Off The Streets work with a cohort of young people that sit outside standard schooling processes. Our young people are often disengaged from society due to substance abuse, domestic and family violence, trauma, mental health and severely disrupted past educational experiences. The NCCD model, unfortunately, does not adequately recognise the true nature of the work that is involved to serve the needs of this cohort.

We respect the NNCD model and the work that has gone into this but we feel that for those young people who have trauma-based needs, the Government must either broaden the definitions and evidence needs or must provide alternative funding options for schools like ours.

Submission

Questions

Is the funding provided under the loadings for the top three NCCD levels of adjustment appropriate to support students with disability to access and participate in education on the same basis as other students?

How does the level of resources required to support a student at each level of adjustment differ?

The Young People that Youth Off the Streets supports within its Special Assistance Schools often enrol without a diagnosis having been made or find themselves in a chaotic situation that doesn't assist with their diagnosis. For the cohort we serve, the Substantial and Extensive levels both require intensive individualised support across a range of areas that would often be far beyond those of their peers in mainstream schools. In Youth Off The Streets Schools, this entails utilising at a minimum; a Psychologist, a specialised Youth Worker and a Teacher. Our schools require additional administrative staff to follow up on all the needs of our students, as well as the evidence required by the Department to secure any additional funding.

One of the key factors in terms of resourcing is the time required to ascertain the true needs of the young people we work with. Before addressing other needs, we must first gain the trust of the young person, so that their immediate safety can be secured. This may include some housing or their current home situation. To move forward with a young person's education more often than not we have to try and identify all agencies and health professionals they have engaged with to get the full picture of their needs.

With the complex and chaotic lives of our cohort it is important to note that the administrative load to apply for even the base level of funding is significant.

Does school setting or context impact on the cost of adjustments provided?

Due to the specialised needs of the young people we work with, we have a high staff to student ratio and small class sizes. Economies of scale that can be obtained in larger and mainstream schools are not possible in Specialised Assistance Schools due to the transient nature of the cohort. Their complex lives result in fluctuating attendance patterns and a lack of consistency with the services they need. We find that students are often not connected with external services or have become disenfranchised requiring Youth Off The Streets Staff to broker and maintain them.

There is a distinct lack of evidence that flows through from previous schools this lack of continuity necessitates a more intense introduction to the student as his or her needs are defined. Often this lack of evidence is a

result of poor or zero attendance at school for some time or lack of trust/cooperation from the student with their previous school.

These factors combined with others do affect the cost of adjustments provided, especially for the level and numbers of specialist staff needed. The variability of our students' needs and the impact of trauma upon their lives adds time and complexity to the interventions and work required. These realities combine to add costs to the adjustments provided. It is a competitive market for specialist staff and YOTS finds it needs to pay above award in order to attract those with the skills needed.

Does the stage of education impact the cost of adjustments needed; for example, in the early years and transitioning to secondary education?

We find that significant adjustment is required due to gaps in the flow through the stages (eg significant gaps at stage 3&4 flowing through to stage 5). Disruption to schooling, significant periods of non-attendance or sporadic attendance are common issues with the students we work with. The result here is that we will often find the need to revisit earlier stages in order to build an educational base.

What costs of supporting students with disability (for example, fixed system costs, costs of collection, assurance and management of the NCCD at a school level) should be factored into the loadings?

All of these costs should be factored in, in our example, many of these costs are incurred prior to funding and without any certainty as to the level or the sustainability of the funding. Professional development, planning time, staff release, IT costs (Sentral), staff counselling and other resources are all items that need to be factored into the true costs of serving this cohort. We find that that the YOTS Cohort often need additional resources including warm clothing, personal hygiene needs and food have to be supplied by YOTS to enable the student to access education.

Are there any other factors that impact on the level of resources required to provide adjustments?

From an administrative point of view, the absence of evidence from prior educational settings, the transient nature of Youth Off The Streets students and the complex trauma-based needs of the young people we serve are all major factors in resourcing for our students. We need to offer a holistic care package to each young person and cannot move forward with them educationally until we define and start to address the needs that sit outside the standard schools' remit. These factors can include; trauma, domestic and family violence, mental health needs, homelessness or substance abuse.

Are Australian Government assurance processes, undertaken to support the accuracy of information provided to calculate a school's Australian Government funding entitlement relating to students with disability, appropriate and sufficiently robust and how might they be effectively improved?

We felt that the validation process recently conducted by PWC was thorough and robust. It was good to see the department and the contracted group taking a real interest in understanding the context of our schools prior to the visits and work undertaken.

The gaps seem to lie in the definitions involved in the NCCD model and whether the young people we work with in our Special Assistance School, are only partially recognised by this model.

We respect the model but feel strongly that for Youth Off The Streets schools and for schools who serve a similar client group that the burden of evidence required to justify the true levels is too high. For the students we work with, the intervention we make is multifaceted and the scope of this work is not fully captured by the SWD assessment process.