

My child has deafblindness

Information for Queensland families of young children



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A Parent Connect resource

Message from the Minister



As parents, you will have many questions when you find your child has deafblindness. Especially about what supports and services are available.

There are more than 100 causes of deafblindness and although it is uncommon, children with deafblindness and their families require unique and specialised support and services.

During the early years, specialist services provide a foundation of support for children with deafblindness — they can enable a child to achieve important developmental milestones.

My child has deafblindness provides families with the information they need to support their child's inclusion in family and community life.

The resource includes practical information about the services and supports available to a child with deafblindness, as well as how parents can best support their child's development.

Through initiatives such as Parent Connect the Queensland Government is committed to improving direct services to families. We are also delivering more assistance to families by increasing the number of speech and language pathologists for all children with a disability in Queensland schools.

We are committed to delivering new priorities for Queensland that enable a better future for Queensland families of children with disability.

I would like to thank Deaf Services Queensland and the Deafblind Association for their contribution to this guide and for their ongoing support for Queensland families.

The Honourable Tracy Davis MP
Minister for Communities, Child Safety
and Disability Services

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1. About deafblindness

This guide is intended to answer some of the questions that you may have if you have concerns your child has deafblindness or your child has recently been diagnosed with deafblindness.

Deafblindness is the full or partial loss of both vision and hearing that results in the need for specific communication methods. It is sometimes described as 'dual sensory loss'.

Children who have deafblindness can communicate and engage with people and the world around them. The impact of deafblindness on a child will differ depending on the degree of hearing and vision impairment and when the impairments occurred: at birth, infancy or early childhood.

A child who has deafblindness at birth or in early childhood will face significant challenges to their development, social interaction, learning and movement. However, these challenges can be minimised through the right support and intervention.

Deafblindness is rare in babies and infants although some conditions, such as Usher syndrome, mean that a child born with a single sensory loss (vision or hearing) will lose the other sense over time.

There are more than 100 different causes of deafblindness. For children, the most common causes are:

- rubella
- CHARGE syndrome, a genetic disorder
- cytomegalovirus, a prenatal condition
- Usher syndrome, congenital deafness combined with the deteriorating eye condition known as retinitis pigmentosa.

Tips for parents

You know your child best, and as they grow and develop you will be able to assess whether they are achieving developmental milestones. For example, it is typical for a child to start to babble and grasp toys at six months of age.

What are the early signs of deafblindness?

Babies who have deafblindness:

- show little activity and little movement of limbs
- may display unusual and unexpected movements
- may cry less
- are awake less than other children.

Crying is a typical behaviour in babies. It enhances their interaction with the world around them and provides learning opportunities. Because a baby who has deafblindness may cry less, they may be at risk of receiving less attention from care givers and being exposed to fewer experiences.

If your baby is showing any of these signs, it may indicate deafblindness. However, remember that all children develop differently and it doesn't automatically mean that your child has deafblindness.

If you notice delays in your child's development, speak with your GP or paediatrician immediately.

The key thing to remember is to seek a diagnosis as early as possible so if your child does have deafblindness, you can access all available supports and services, including intervention services, and get the best possible outcome for your child.

Are there different types of deafblindness?

Children who have deafblindness have varying degrees of vision and hearing impairment and therefore different communication and mobility needs.

A child with a moderate hearing impairment and moderate vision impairment may communicate verbally and use large print to read.

A child who has severe vision impairment or who is blind and has a moderate hearing impairment may use Braille but communicate verbally with the support of an amplifier.

Children with severe vision and hearing impairment may be supported using tactile communication such as fingerspelling or Braille.

Some of the communication options for children who have deafblindness may include:

- Braille
- cochlear implants/hearing aids with speech
- sign language
- tadoma (tactile lip reading)
- morse code (for example, MorseSMS)
- object symbols (for example, being presented with a sponge may mean having a bath).

Children with deafblindness, of any degree, can and do learn how to communicate, move around and live full lives. Your child will most likely need additional supports as he or she develops, attends childcare, kindy and school, and continues learning into adulthood.

Remember that having deafblindness is just one part of who your child is and that it may affect each child differently. It is important not to underestimate what your child can achieve.

Many adults with deafblindness live independently, have jobs and participate actively in their community.

Tips for parents

You will find a lot of information on the internet about deafblindness. It's important to gather information from a range of sources and to find out whether the information is being provided by a reputable organisation and if it is current.

Find out more

Australian Deafblind Council
www.deafblind.org.au

The department of Health

- **Health Hearing Program**
- **Child development red flags**
- **The Department of Health Paediatric Audiology clinics**
www.health.qld.gov.au

Australian Hearing
131 797
www.hearing.com.au

Audiologists in Queensland
The Audiological Society of Australia has a list of audiology services in Queensland
www.audiology.asn.au

2. Diagnosis

All children develop at their own rates. This can make it difficult to know if your child is reaching developmental milestones. As a parent though, you know your child best, so trust your instinct and consult your doctor if you have any concerns.

Diagnosing deafblindness requires assessments to understand both the vision and hearing skills of your child.

Finding out your child has deafblindness will affect each family differently; there is no right or wrong way to feel, but it is important to remember there is a lot you can do to support your child to grow and develop.

Getting a diagnosis may assist you to better understand what your child may be experiencing and will enable you to explore and identify what early intervention therapies may assist your child.

Medical practitioners may not always see what you see, or agree with your assessment — but if you are still concerned, seek another opinion.

Who provides a diagnosis of deafblindness in Queensland?

Hearing impairment diagnosis

Through the Department of Health's Healthy Hearing Program, hearing tests are free for infants after birth across Queensland in private and public hospitals. If your child has not had a hearing test, speak to your GP or child health clinic if you suspect your child has a hearing loss. You can also access the Hear and Say Centre's infant screening program.

Diagnosis of hearing impairment is based on hearing assessments

undertaken by an audiologist, however, the cause of the impairment will usually be determined by a paediatrician, ear nose and throat specialist or a clinical geneticist.

Hearing tests conducted by an audiologist identify where the hearing problem is located (outer, middle or inner ear) and what can be done to help. These tests are safe, unobtrusive and accurate.

Your GP or paediatrician can refer you to an audiologist at an audiology clinic at a public hospital or to Australian Hearing, which is located throughout Queensland (including rural and remote areas).

An audiology consultation at a public hospital clinic or at Australian Hearing is free.

You can also choose to see a private audiologist — there will usually be costs for private audiologists but waiting times for an appointment may be shorter.

Vision impairment diagnosis

In Queensland, an ophthalmologist or optometrist can diagnose vision impairment.

An ophthalmologist is a medical doctor who specialises in eyes. They diagnose eye conditions and prescribe lenses or medication or other forms of medical treatment. A diagnosis by an ophthalmologist may be required in order to access some services.

Your child will need a referral from a GP to see an ophthalmologist. Ophthalmologists can be seen privately or through the public health system. There will usually be costs for private ophthalmologists, however, waiting times for an appointment may be shorter. The consultation will be at no cost if it is with an ophthalmologist in the public health system.

The diagnosis process will involve an eye test using an eye chart. Sometimes an ophthalmologist will dilate your child's eyes with eye drops to assist with examining them. Find out whether this may happen so you can talk to your child about this before the appointment. When you make the appointment ask any questions you have about how the assessment is done.

An optometrist prescribes and fits glasses and contact lenses and can detect eye conditions and disease, short sightedness, long sightedness or astigmatism.

Families living in rural and remote areas may be able to access a visiting paediatrician or ophthalmologist. Local Area Coordinators can provide information to families on how to access a visiting specialist to obtain a diagnosis.

Other professionals

You may find that other professionals will be involved in your child's diagnosis.

Ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialists

ENT specialists monitor and treat ear, nose and throat conditions. They can perform surgery and prescribe medication. An ENT specialist will also be involved in the process of assessing your child to see if they are a suitable candidate for a cochlear implant.

Tips for parents

There are a number of things you can do at home to support your baby's development, such as encouraging their natural curiosity and helping them to understand some things make sounds. For other tips visit www.babyhearing.org

Tips for parents

Create a file for your child. It's a good idea to keep all of your child's information together. Keep all records in a binder with section tabs — this may help when trying to access a service. For example, birth certificate, original diagnosis, medical reports, therapy reports, medical and health receipts.

Audiologists

Audiologists diagnose, test and treat people who have hearing, balance and other sensory-related problems. They are responsible for the non-medical management of hearing loss and may fit hearing aids for your child.

Clinical geneticists

Clinical geneticists specialise in the way conditions are passed between generations. A geneticist can provide advice on the cause of your child's deafblindness.

Orthoptists

Orthoptists specialise in assessing visual function, prescribing therapy such as occlusion (patching), and perform specialised tests to diagnose eye conditions and visual function. They may also assess your child for low-vision aids.

After diagnosis

It is not unusual for parents to feel overwhelmed when they first learn about their child's diagnosis of deafblindness. Even if you have suspected for some time that your child may have deafblindness it is important to recognise you are likely to need extra support.

You may get this support from your family and friends, but it is also good to talk to your GP. Your GP can tell you about local parent support groups and the availability of professional support, such as a counsellor or social worker, if you are feeling overwhelmed.

When your child receives a diagnosis of deafblindness a number of things will happen. Your paediatrician will discuss the types of supports and services that will optimise your child's development and a treatment plan will be developed. You will also receive information on the supports and services available in your local community.

Parent Connect

The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services' Parent Connect initiative supports parents of newborns and children newly diagnosed with disability. It is an early response service providing information and linking families to family support networks, community services and funding to access specialist services.

Child Health Services in the community

Staffed by nurses and allied health professionals, free child health services are available at community clinics. Home visiting may also be provided. Child health checks are recommended at one, two, four, six and 12 months of age. Information is available on child health, parenting, child development, immunisation and nutrition.

Families can be linked to local services and parent groups.

For further information refer to your baby's Red Book (personal health record).

Carers Queensland

Carers Queensland provides carers with information, education, training, advocacy, counselling and other support services that may assist them in their caring role. The organisation also raises awareness about the valuable role and contributions of carers.

Financial support

If you live in a rural or remote area and need to travel to attend specialist medical appointments, you may be eligible for the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme. Ask your GP for further information.

Find out more

Vision Australia

www.visionaustralia.org

Child Health Services

13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84)

www.health.qld.gov.au

Carers Queensland

3900 8100

1800 242 636 (Advisory Service)

www.carersqld.asn.au

Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme

www.health.qld.gov.au

Centrelink

132 468

www.humanservices.gov.au

Disability Online

www.qld.gov.au/disability

Disability Information Services

1800 177 120

www.communities.qld.gov.au

Should your child's support needs mean you are unable to enter paid employment, you may be eligible for a Carer Payment. Centrelink can provide you with more information regarding your eligibility as well as information on supplementary payments such as Carer Allowance and Child Disability Assistance Payment.

Find out more

Parent Connect is provided by the following organisations:

Cairns – The Benevolent Society
4045 0003
www.benevolent.org.au

Townsville – The Cootharinga Society of North Queensland
4759 2008
www.cootharinga.org.au

Rockhampton – The Cootharinga Society of North Queensland in partnership with The Umbrella Network
4928 6550
www.theumbrellanetwork.org

Sunshine Coast – Sunshine Coast Children's Therapy Centre
5441 4937
www.scctc.org.au

Brisbane North – Mission Australia
3828 9311

Brisbane South – Mission Australia
3713 2602

Ipswich – Mission Australia
3713 2602
www.missionaustralia.com.au

Gold Coast – The Benevolent Society
5644 9400
www.benevolent.org.au

3. Early intervention services

Early intervention services are important for children with deafblindness to help them develop skills in play, communication, social relationships and functional behaviours.

Services can also help develop your child's independence and ability to adapt to their environment. Services can also provide the skills your child needs to participate in child care and kindergarten and their readiness for school.

Early intervention supports for a child who has deafblindness may include:

- information and planning
- advice on your child's development needs
- coordination of services for children with complex needs
- therapy to support your child to develop their communication, movement or social skills
- support for transition when starting child care or kindergarten
- counselling and linking with other families and support groups

Early intervention services should be family centred. Disability doesn't only impact your child; all members of the family, including brothers and sisters, are affected. Family members can be involved in early intervention services and through this support gain a better understanding of deafblindness.

Find out more

Intensive early intervention for children with deafblindness is very effective. However, it is not just the amount of therapy, but the quality of the therapy your child receives that makes a real difference.

Tips for parents

Good communication between you and your child's early intervention providers is critical. It is important for your child's therapists to encourage your involvement and interest, regularly assess your child's progress, and modify programs if gains are not made.

How will my child benefit from early intervention?

Early intervention is most effective and provides the best possible outcomes for your child when provided as early as possible after diagnosis.

Early childhood intervention services should be tailored to the individual needs of your child and family. It is important for you as a parent to have a good rapport with your child's specialists and feel able to ask lots of questions about their therapy and progress.

Early childhood intervention services can provide you and your family with knowledge, skills and support to meet the needs of your child. These services optimise your child's development and increase their ability to participate in family and community life.

All services recognise the importance of working in partnership with families. Ideally, services will be provided with flexibility that meets the needs of as many families as possible.

Successful early intervention services may involve professionals working directly with your child as well as

teaching you strategies to support your child to develop their potential.

Professionals should spend time with you working on goals that can be incorporated into your family routines and play activities.

Where can I access early intervention supports?

Both the Queensland Government and the Australian Government fund early intervention services for children who have deafblindness in Queensland. This section details the main services available.

Better Start

Australian Government funding for early intervention services is available for children diagnosed with deafblindness through the Better Start initiative. Your child must have a diagnosis and be registered with Better Start before they turn six years of age, however, you can access funding up until their seventh birthday.

Better Start provides up to \$12,000 (maximum \$6000 per year) for your child to access services, including audiology, occupational therapy, orthoptics, physiotherapy, psychology and speech and language pathology.

Families living in regional or remote areas may be eligible for an additional one-off payment of \$2000. This payment is to assist with additional expenses associated with accessing services.

Up to \$2100 (35 per cent) per year of a child's early intervention funding can be used to purchase resources.

Resources must either be recommended by a Better Start service provider, be directly linked to an early intervention service or be for the delivery of interventions in the family home.

Medicare

Children with deafblindness may be eligible for services funded through Medicare. These include:

- developing a treatment and management plan by a specialist, consultant physician or GP for children under 13 years
- up to four sessions of services with health professionals such as audiologists, occupational specialists, speech and language pathologists or physiotherapists to develop a child's plan
- twenty sessions of intervention services with health professionals as identified in a child's plan — available for children up to 15 years.

Speak to your GP or medical specialist for more information about these Medicare services.

Deaf Services Queensland

Deaf Services Queensland provides and facilitates a range of programs and services aimed at assisting people who are deaf, hearing impaired or deafblind. Parents are able to visit Deaf Services Queensland to access a range of information, support, and sign languages classes (including baby sign). As a leading not-for-profit organisation servicing the deaf and deafblind community, parents can also access Deaf Services Queensland's strong referral network to access further services.

Hear and Say Centre

The Hear and Say Centre is a not-for-profit organisation based in Brisbane with regional centres in the Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, Cairns and Toowoomba areas. They also provide an outreach program for children in rural and remote areas. The centre aims to integrate children with a hearing impairment into the community and school at the earliest possible time.

The Hear and Say Centre uses a family-focused approach, working with the parents as the natural teacher of their child.

Queensland Hearing Loss Family Support Service

The Department of Health provides free counselling and support to families of children diagnosed with permanent hearing loss. This service is available to families of children from when they are referred for diagnostic hearing testing until the child has completed Year 1. Support can involve working with you to overcome any difficulties you may have in getting to audiology appointments, as well as providing your family with information about your child's hearing loss.

Vision Australia

Vision Australia provides training and resources to support children aged from birth through to school-leaving age. Specialists work with children and their families to develop programs that are tailored to their needs.

Australian Hearing

This is an Australian Government provided hearing service which is available across Australia, including in rural and remote areas. Services for children include:

- comprehensive hearing assessments
- individual assessments of your child and family member to understand their needs
- fitting of the latest technology hearing aids where appropriate
- fitting of other devices, such as FM systems
- evaluating your child's performance with hearing aids or other devices.

Australian Hearing can also refer you to other early intervention service providers.

Tips for parents

Talk to your child's therapist about your child's interests and strengths and ideas for incorporating these into home activities.

Guide Dogs Queensland

Guide Dogs Queensland works with children from a young age, providing them with mobility training and helping to develop their orientation skills. Instructors incorporate play and exploration activities that are fun and safe and teach children how to develop other skills.

Find out more

Better Start contact
Carers Queensland
1800 242 636
www.betterstart.net.au

Medicare
132 011
www.humanservices.gov.au

Queensland Hearing Loss Family Support Service
1800 352 075
www.health.qld.gov.au

Australian Hearing
131 797
www.hearing.com.au

Deaf Services Queensland
3892 8500
www.deafservicesqld.org.au

Hear and Say Centre
www.hearandsay.com.au

Guide Dogs Queensland
1800 810 122
www.guidedogsqld.com.au

Australian DeafBlind Council
www.deafblind.org.au

Able Australia
www.ableaustralia.org.au

Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children

The Sydney-based Royal Institute's Teleschool provides high-quality services to families living in rural and regional areas of Australia who have a child diagnosed with hearing and vision impairment. The service is free and available from the time a child is diagnosed and no referral is required.

Early intervention services

The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services provides early intervention support to children who have, or are at risk of, developmental delays. This includes children with deafblindness.

These services can support your child in their play and independence, as well as develop their communication skills, and gross and fine motor movements.

The department also provides information on a range of topics and will support you to connect with other services such as playgroups, childcare and parent support groups.

Children are prioritised for services according to their level of need and availability of places.

Early childhood development programs and services

Multidisciplinary therapy and early intervention services are available through the Department of Education, Training and Employment for children from birth to pre-Prep age who have a suspected or diagnosed disability with significant educational needs. This includes children who have deafblindness.

Programs and services may include playgroup session, outreach support in your home, centre-based sessions, and support to transition to Prep. The program can also provide access to advisory visiting teachers, who have specialist knowledge and skills to support your child at school. Contact your local Education Queensland regional offices for

information on how to access these programs and services.

Local Area Coordinators

Local Area Coordinators link children with disability and their families in regional, rural and remote areas with supports and services relating to their individual needs and interests including accessing visiting specialists to obtain a diagnosis.

Child Development Services

The Department of Health provides early childhood intervention services to eligible children with a moderate to severe developmental delay or disability up to nine years of age.

Priority is given to children not eligible to receive services from other Queensland Government agencies.

Services include providing advice on your child's developmental needs and therapy services that encourage your child's development. Parent education and information sessions are also provided. Contact the Department of Health for information on your nearest Child Development Service.

Yeerongpilly Centre for Young Deaf Children

The Department of Education, Training and Employment has an early intervention centre that specialises in providing speech and language services to children who are deaf or have a hearing impairment. Services are for children aged from birth to six years and are designed to help your child's speech and language skills.

Support for parents

As a parent, it can be a challenge to strike the right balance between supporting your child with deafblindness and the needs of the rest of your family. It is normal to feel overwhelmed from time to time, especially during times of change, such as when your child starts school.

Make sure you have a good network of people around you, and don't be afraid to ask your GP or early intervention service provider for information about formal support such as classes, self-help groups or counselling.

You may find that the best support comes from other parents who know what you are going through. Early intervention service providers will be able to give you advice about how to link with other parents of children who have deafblindness.

You may also find it useful to access some of the following services which provide support for parents, carers and families of children with disability.

Deaf Services Queensland

Provides an information service for families as well as Auslan and baby sign language classes. Classes are provided on a fee-for-service basis.

Aussie Deaf Kids

Has a website with lots of resources for parents of children with a hearing loss. It includes an online forum for parents to connect with each other as well as details of support groups.

Deaf Children Australia

Provides information on advocacy services for families of children up to 18 years who are deaf or have a hearing impairment.

POD QLD

Is a parent network, run by parents of children who are deaf or who have a hearing loss.

Tips for parents

It's important to encourage your child to develop their strengths, skills and interests. This will help them to learn, communicate and socialise with other people and go on to achieve their full potential.

Vision Australia

Provides a range of support and resources about blindness and low-vision services.

Raising Children Network website

Is an Australian Government initiative that provides a web-based source of information about parenting and child development activities for children, including children with disabilities.

Find out more

Early childhood development programs and services

Contact your local education regional offices

www.education.qld.gov.au

Child Development Services

13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84)

www.health.qld.gov.au

Yeerongpilly Early Childhood Development Program

3426 4222

www.yeerongpillyecdp.eq.edu.au

Deaf Services Queensland

3892 8500

www.deafservicesqld.org.au

Aussie Deaf Kids

www.aussiedeafkids.org.au

Deaf Children Australia

1800 645 916

www.deafchildreinaustralia.org.au

Other parents

Parents often find the best support they have comes from other parents of children with deafblindness. Other parents understand the joys and challenges of raising a child with deafblindness and can share advice and information about local services and supports.

Triple P — Positive Parenting Program

Triple P — Positive Parenting Program can help families who have a child with support needs to creatively problem solve and develop flexible and supportive family routines and strategies to support their child's learning and development.

Stepping Stones Triple P has been specially tailored for parents of children with disability. It can help parents address their children's behaviour and emotional problems which may be more challenging at times (e.g. going to sleep, mealtimes, choosing what clothes to wear, dressing, toileting, going shopping and going to the doctors).

Stepping Stones Triple P can be accessed in different ways, including information seminars, individual sessions on specific issues, group sessions, online options, and tip sheets and workbooks for parents.

Playgroups

Play is an integral part of all children's development, including children with a disability. Through play, a child learns, builds confidence and develops a range of skills in readiness for childcare, kindergarten and school.

Playgroups nurture children with play-based learning experiences during key times of growth and development in their early years.

Playgroups offer a wonderful opportunity for young children to come

together and play in a safe, relaxed and welcoming environment.

Playgroups are low cost and inclusive and all children under school age are welcome.

Play groups also help families by providing social support for parents. It provides an environment where parents can discuss and share parenting experiences and get information on how to address parenting issues.

There are a range of playgroups available, including community playgroups, supported playgroups, PlayConnect and the Playgroup Plus Program.

MyTime groups

Provide local support for mums, dads, grandparents and anyone caring for a young child under school age with a disability or chronic medical condition.

MyTime gives parents the chance to socialise and share ideas with others who understand the rewards and intensity of the caring role. Parents can meet with people in similar circumstances to have fun, hear from others and find out about available community support. Research-based parenting information is also available at group meetings.

Each group has a play helper who can lead children in activities such as singing, drawing, and playing with toys, blocks or sand so parents can spend time focusing on catching up with others.

Baby Bridges

Is a playgroup program for children with a disability from birth to five years. Parents and carers hear up-to-date information from carers and specialists while their child attends a playgroup taken by professional occupational, music or speech specialists.

Find out more

Search for services or specialists in your local area through the websites of professional associations

The Australian Physiotherapy Association

www.physiotherapy.asn.au

Speech Pathology Australia

www.speechpathology.australia.org.au

Occupational therapy Australia

www.otqld.org.au

Australian Psychological Society

www.psychology.org.au

Find out more

Vision Australia

1300 84 74 66

www.visionaustralia.org

POD Qld

www.podqld.com

Raising Children Network: the Australian parent website

www.raisingchildren.net.au

Triple P — Positive Parenting Program

3236 1212

www.triplep-steppingstones.net

www.triplep-parenting.net

Playgroup Queensland

1800 171 882

www.playgroupqld.com.au

MyTime Groups

1800 889 997

www.mytime.net.au

Baby Bridges

Contact the Horizon Foundation

3245 4266

www.babybridges.com.au

4. Early childhood education and care

What are early childhood education and care services?

Early childhood education and care services include child care and kindergarten services. Children can attend approved child care services from birth and all children are eligible to attend a kindergarten program in the year before they commence school (Prep). The Queensland Government provides funding support to approved kindergarten programs delivered in long day care or kindergarten services.

The early years of any child's life have a significant impact on their future health, development, learning and wellbeing. It is generally accepted that children who participate in early childhood education are likely to have better academic performance, better behaviour, and stay in education for longer. This includes children with deafblindness.

Participating in a quality early childhood education and care program can provide children with deafblindness opportunities to develop their social, communication and play skills from an early age.

Tips for parents

Link your therapist or early intervention provider with your child's kindergarten teacher to help plan your child's program. They can also help identify the supports they will need, such as any aids and equipment being used by your child.

Tips for parents

Talk to your child's kindergarten teacher about their strengths and areas that may need development, as well as how your child may prefer to learn new things.

How will my child benefit from child care?

Child care provides all children with an early opportunity to relate to peers and other adults. It is no different for children with deafblindness. It can also be an opportunity for you to receive input from qualified early childhood professionals and try new approaches to supporting the development of your child.

As a parent child care can also provide you with opportunities to return to work, study or to have time with other members of your family.

What supports are available for my child to attend child care?

The Australian Government supports children with disabilities who attend child care through the Inclusion and Professional Support Program. This support may be available to:

- subsidise the cost of additional educators or carers
- provide access to specialist equipment to assist inclusion
- provide professional development and resources for educators.

How will my child benefit from a kindergarten program?

All children benefit from participating in an approved quality early education program, including children with deafblindness.

Participation in a kindergarten program can help your child to develop skills in communication, social interaction and behaviour. It can also assist your child to follow routines and to be exposed to early literacy and numeracy concepts.

Participation in a kindergarten program will give your child a greater chance of successfully transitioning into Prep and then into mainstream schooling.

Kindergarten programs offer play-based learning in a fun and nurturing environment.

All children benefit from these early learning experiences and will develop abilities including:

- being involved and learning to interact with other children
- developing a desire to learn as well as ways of getting involved in learning
- understanding and managing their feelings
- learning about themselves
- developing their identity
- confidence and independence
- building communication skills.

How will my child be supported in a kindergarten program?

Kindergarten teachers in kindergarten services and long day care services can access support to assist children with deafblindness to participate in their programs.

Children with disability, including children with deafblindness, can receive additional support to

participate in a kindergarten program. Kindergarten services can apply under the Disability Support Funding Program through the Department of Education Training and Employment, to receive additional funding to support your child's participation in their kindergarten program.

Additional support may include:

- equipment and play resources
- training and professional development for kindergarten teachers
- extra teacher aide time to support the child's inclusion in the kindergarten program.

Kindergarten programs in long day care services may be eligible for the Australian Government's Inclusion and Professional Support Program.

This program provides professional development and other assistance to child care services supporting children with additional needs.

Kindergarten teachers can modify the kindergarten program to support the inclusion of your child. The wider kindergarten community can also be provided with information about deafblindness to encourage inclusion of your child and your family in the service.

Find out more

Early childhood education and care services

Early years centres provide education, family support and health services for children 0 – 8 years.

www.dete.qld.gov.au

Or phone 13 QGOV

Inclusion and Professional Support Program (Australian Government)

www.mychild.gov.au

How do I plan my child's transition into a kindergarten program?

Starting in a kindergarten program involves a significant transition for children with deafblindness and their families.

Your child will most likely need a period of preparation before they start in a kindergarten program. For example, support to settle in and ongoing support to ensure their needs are being met and they are achieving educational goals.

Successful transition planning requires a team approach with your family and the kindergarten teacher, which should begin six to 12 months before your child starts in the service.

Transition planning for your child to start their kindergarten program involves a range of activities including enrolment, working with the kindergarten teacher to plan a suitable program for your child and help to identify the additional supports needed, such as training and educational and play equipment.

Other activities involved in your transition planning for your child includes visiting the kindergarten to become more familiar with the environment and routines, and gradually adjusting routines at home to be similar to those they will experience in the program.

Tips for parents

Learn about the activities and routine in the kindergarten program and introduce a similar routine at home, so your child becomes familiar with these activities and routines.

5. Starting school

Starting school is an important time for children and families. The transition to school may present challenges for your child, as well as for the rest of your family, and good planning is critical. It is important to start planning for the transition to school at least 12 months before your child is due to commence.

The choice of school is a decision parents will make depending on their child's needs and abilities and the resources available. It is best to seek advice from your local school before you make a final decision.

Where can I enrol my child?

All children are able to enrol at their local state school. You will need to complete enrolment forms and may be asked to have an interview with a staff member.

It is best to talk to the principal of the school you are considering to check the type and level of support available for your child before completing enrolment forms. You may also be asked to attend an interview with a staff member as part of the process.

Choosing a school for your child is an important decision, so it may also be useful to talk to other parents who have children at the school you are considering.

Tips for parents

Check to see if the school you are considering has an open day that you can attend with your child.

Tips for parents

Introducing your child to the concept of timetables is a good idea before they start school. It also provides an opportunity to work with your child to develop new vocabulary they will need at school.

Is my child ready for Prep?

Prep is offered in all state schools as a full five-day-per-week program. To be eligible for Prep a child must turn five by 30 June in the year they start Prep. With the introduction of the Australian Curriculum, full-time attendance in Prep gives students the foundation they need for successful learning in Year 1.

If you are concerned that your child is not ready to start Prep at that time, you can choose to start your child a year later when they become of compulsory school age (six years and six months).

You should discuss the specific needs of your child with the principal of the school you plan to enrol your child in. The principal will help you determine the impact of delaying your child's entry into Prep.

Parents of compulsory school-age children have a legal obligation to ensure their children are enrolled in school and attend every day of the educational program in which they are enrolled. Enrolment and full-time attendance at Prep fulfils this obligation.

How can I prepare my child for school?

Starting school is a big step for all children and their families. Children develop at different rates and in different ways. It is important to tell your child you believe they are ready for school.

We recommend you contact your local school in the year before you enrol your child to discuss your child's individual needs. This will give the school time for planning to ensure your child has a successful and positive start to schooling. If you are concerned about your child's readiness for school, discuss this with the school of your choice and your early intervention service provider.

If your child has been receiving services from an early childhood intervention service or a kindergarten program, staff from these services can provide information to the school about your child's strengths and support needs, which will assist with the transition process.

There are a number of things you can do to help prepare your child for transitioning to school. This should include visiting the school many times before starting school, initially during quiet times of the day (possibly before or after school hours) and later at busier times so your child becomes familiar with the school environment.

While some early intervention programs finish once a child starts kindergarten or Prep, many programs offer support during the transition period, so make sure you check what other support your early intervention service can offer you. In some cases your early intervention service may be able to attend your planning meeting with your child's kindergarten or Prep staff.

Tips for parents

As a parent, you play a vital role in your child's education. By getting involved in the school, you can help your child make a smooth and happy start to their education.

How will my child be supported to learn at school?

The Australian Curriculum Foundation Year has been developed to give students in Prep the important foundational learning they will need for successful progression to Year 1.

The Australian Curriculum started in Queensland in the 2012 school year. It aims to provide a high-quality curriculum for all, while understanding the diverse and complex nature of students with disability. It is shaped by the proposition that each student can learn and the needs of every student are important.

The principal is responsible for ensuring that all students with disability are provided with appropriate adjustments to enable them to access the curriculum.

When required, students who have deafblindness can be supported through appropriate adjustments made by teachers and schools in relation to:

- what a student learns
- how the student learns and instructional processes
- how the student demonstrates what they have learned
- the environment in which the student learns.

Tips for parents

Having good communication with your child's teacher will help your child to have a successful education experience. It will also help you to quickly sort out any issues that arise.

Student support services

Some students who have deafblindness will require additional educational support so they are able to access and participate in school alongside their same-age peers.

These students can be supported through the full array of student support services allocated to regions and schools. This may include assistive technology, specialised equipment, special provisions for assessment, and access to specialist visiting advisory teachers. Students may also have access to speech and language pathologists, teacher aide support such as note taking, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and guidance officers, if required. Talk to your child's school about these services.

Non-government schools

Catholic Education's Education Adjustment Program supports students who have disability in Catholic Schools by identifying the educational adjustments required by a school to meet the learning and teaching needs of your child. Other non-government schools may have specialist services for children with deafblindness — check with the principal of the school you are considering.

Tips for parents

Work out with your child's teacher how you are going to communicate, such as through regular face-to-face meetings, emails or using a communication book.

Find out more

Local schools can provide:

Education for children with a disability: a guide for parents

School Transport Assistance Program for Students with Disabilities

Support for children with disability at school

www.education.qld.gov.au

Delayed entry to prep

www.dete.qld.gov.au

Australian curriculum

www.australiancurriculum.edu.au

6. Aids, equipment and assistive technology

If your child's disability affects their functioning across a range of areas, you may need to access assistive technology, specialised equipment or other aids to assist them in their daily living, communicating, learning, therapy and play. Professionals involved in your child's health, education and therapy will be able to give you advice regarding the most appropriate aids, equipment and assistive technology to consider.

This section details some services that may assist you to access support in this area.

Department of Health — Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme

The Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme (MASS) provides access to subsidy funding for the provision of MASS endorsed aids and equipment to eligible Queensland residents, including children with disability.

The range of MASS aids and equipment is aimed at assisting people to live at home and includes aids for mobility, communication, continence and daily living.

Aids and equipment are subsidy funded either on a permanent loan basis, private ownership or through the purchase of consumables.

Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services

Assistance can be provided to purchase aids, equipment and assistive technology for eligible children if the item is related to the disability and encourages independence and community participation.

To access this assistance, a prescription from your child's therapist is required. For more information, contact your nearest Disability Services service centre.

CAEAT Initiative

The Community Aids Equipment and Assistive Technologies Initiative subsidises aids and equipment for eligible clients. Categories for aids and assistive technologies include community mobility, communication support, active participation and postural support.

LifeTec

LifeTec Queensland provides information, consultation, and education on assistive technology which aims to help improve quality of life and increase independent living skills. LifeTec has offices in Brisbane and Townsville and has a mobile outreach team which offers services across the state.

Department of Education, Training and Employment

Education Queensland has an equipment loan service for students with disability. This service provides specialised equipment for students with disability if it supports their educational program. The equipment remains the property of the school when a student leaves.

All abilities playgrounds

All abilities playgrounds are located across Queensland and are specifically designed to enable children with and without disability to enjoy fun and challenging play together, side-by-side. There are 17 playgrounds located across the state.

There is also an All Abilities ePlayground which offers free online fun and games for children of all abilities.

Noah's Ark Toy Library

Noah's Ark Educational Resources and Toy Library has a wide range of toys and equipment, some of which are designed and adapted for children with disability.

To borrow from the Noah's Ark Educational Resources and Toy Library, you will need to be a member of Noah's Ark.

Membership is open to:

- families with a child with a diagnosed disability
- schools supporting a child or children with diagnosed disability
- community organisations supporting a child or children with diagnosed disability
- children's services supporting a child or children with diagnosed disability
- professionals (e.g. teachers, therapists) supporting a child or children with diagnosed disability.

Vision Australia library service

Vision Australia's information library service offers a huge array of information and services in a variety of formats.

Find out more

Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme

www.health.qld.gov.au

Disability Services Service Centres

13 QGOV

www.communities.qld.gov.au

CAEATI

www.qld.gov.au

Lifetec

www.lifetec.org.au

All abilities playgrounds

www.communities.qld.gov.au

Education Queensland

www.education.qld.gov.au

Noah's Ark Toy Library

07 3391 2166

www.noahsark.net.au

Vision Australia library service

www.visionaustralia.org

For further information contact the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services:

Telephone: 13 Q GOV (13 74 68)

Telephone Typewriter (TTY): 133 677

Email: disabilityinfo@disability.qld.gov.au

Web: www.communities.qld.gov.au

If you are deaf, or have a hearing impairment or speech impairment, contact us through the National Relay Service:

- TTY users phone 133 677
- Speak and Listen users phone 1800 555 727 then ask for 13 QGOV (13 74 68)
- Internet relay users connect to the NRS (www.relayservice.com.au) and then ask for 13 74 68

Other languages and formats:

If you need the assistance of an interpreter, please contact the Translating and Interpreting Service, TIS National, on 13 14 50 and ask to be connected to the Disability Information Service.

This document is available in alternative formats (including large print) on request. If you would like a copy in another format, please contact Disability Information Service on 13 QGOV or email disabilityinfo@disability.qld.gov.au

* Calls from mobile phones are charged at applicable rates.

Queenslanders now have access to disability related information at one easy online location. Visit www.qld.gov.au/disability to find out about government supports and services for people with disability, their families and carers. The new site includes links to information about support groups and counselling, education and where to access help.

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