What is ECI, why is it important and how can ECI services support families?

Information for families of children with disability and/or developmental delay

This resource was developed for Early Childhood Intervention Australia (ECIA) by ECIA NSW/ACT
What is Early Childhood Intervention (ECI)?

ECI provides specialised support and services for infants and young children with disability and/or developmental delay and their families to help their development, well-being and participation in family and community life.

The aim of ECI is to ensure that parents and other important adults in the child’s life can provide young children with disability and/or developmental delay with experiences and opportunities that help them gain and use the skills they need to participate meaningfully in their everyday lives.

Importance of the early years

Early childhood is a time of remarkable brain development. Learning and development is most rapid during the early childhood years. Future development is based on the child’s learning during these early years. These early years set up how the child will learn and develop later in life.

Providing quality early childhood intervention (ECI) early in a child’s life supports children to develop the skills they need to take part in everyday activities and to be included in family and community life. These ECI supports received early in life can potentially reduce the amount of supports needed in later life.

ECI is also important for the family. This is when families learn how to support and nurture their child, how to meet their child’s needs and how to adapt to having a child with a disability and/or developmental delay.

“The earlier a child receives quality evidence-based early childhood intervention, the greater the benefits for the child and the family”
How to find Early Childhood Intervention services and further information

• **Local Community Health Services including the Child Health Nurse** provides universal child and family supports and can also refer families and their children to medical and specialised ECI services if required.

• The family’s **Local General Practitioner (GP)** can refer families to a developmental **paediatrician** if there are significant concerns about the child’s development. Paediatricians can assess, evaluate and provide treatment for children and their families with a wide range of behavioural and developmental difficulties.

• **Under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), the Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) approach** is the way most ECI services will be delivered across Australia for children 0-6 years who have disability and/or developmental delay. Families can call the NDIS on **1800 800 110**, or they can be referred to an **ECEI early childhood partner** by their GP, child and family health nurse or paediatrician, or the child’s preschool or child care educator. Please look at the NDIS site for further information and to see whether the NDIS has been rolled out in your area [www.ndis.gov.au/ecei](http://www.ndis.gov.au/ecei).

• If you live in Western Australia, **Early Childhood Intervention Services** will be provided through a state-based WA NDIS. Up to date information can be found at [www.disability.wa.gov.au/wa-ndis/wa-ndis](http://www.disability.wa.gov.au/wa-ndis/wa-ndis) or contact your **Local Coordinator**.


• **The Inclusion Hub** is an informational online tool that supports families and service providers through the NDIS journey [www.theinclusionhub.com.au](http://www.theinclusionhub.com.au).

• **Choosing Quality Early Childhood Intervention Services and Supports for Your Child: What you need to know** is a booklet for families which provide information on what quality evidence-based services and supports look like, to assist families in choosing the right supports and services for their child and family [http://www.ecia.org.au](http://www.ecia.org.au).


• **Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA)** is the national advocacy body which represents children and young people (aged 0-25) with disability [www.cda.org.au](http://www.cda.org.au) or 1800 222 660.

• **Early Childhood Intervention Australia (ECIA)** is the national body for ECI in Australia, representing professionals and organisations that provide services for young children with disability and/or developmental delay and their families [www.ecia.org.au](http://www.ecia.org.au) or (02) 9873 2593.
How do ECI services support children and their families?

Families know their child best and will continue to be involved in their child’s life. Family centred ECI services understand that parents and caregivers have the most powerful influence on their child’s development. ECI services partner with families to ensure that family life and family priorities and choices drive what happens in planning and intervention.

We know that children learn best in everyday situations with familiar people. ECI is about encouraging and supporting everyday learning to naturally build on opportunities for learning and development already being provided at home, child care, preschool, playgroups and in the community such as parks and shopping.

It is a much more effective early intervention if the adults who have the deepest relationships and spend the most time with the child are skilled up to provide intervention through the child’s participation in the activities and daily routines of their everyday life.

It is what happens outside early intervention sessions that makes the difference!
Who delivers ECI services?

Services can be delivered by a range of professionals such as ECI educators/teachers, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, family support workers, social workers, psychologists and other professionals.

The family works together with ECI professionals, and other important adults in the child’s life such as early childhood educators, as a team around the child. One team member, most often called a key worker, is chosen to be the main person coordinating information, services and supports. They are usually the main person working with the family and are always supported by the team.
What sort of supports do ECI services provide for families and their children?

ECI can work with the family to:

- help the family to achieve their goals and hopes for their child
- support their child to further develop skills and abilities to participate in and enjoy daily life
- extend the experiences which the family can provide to support their child’s growth and development and
- support their child to participate and be included in family and community life.

ECI services can include:

- information
- assessment
- specialised early intervention support including therapy and special education
- an individual program to help the child
- support to access and participate in child care, preschool, other child and family services and the broader community
- prescription of equipment
- parent education programs
- planning and coordination of services and
- support to transition to the next educational setting including school.