

School students and chronic illness - finding support

There are a variety of systems available to help schools to effectively support students with a chronic illness. Student Support Services, the Visiting Teacher Service and student welfare coordinators are just some of the professionals who can provide support and advice. Ask the principal of your child's school about how to access these services.

Student Support Services

Student Support Services are a group of professionals who provide support to students and schools. The principal is responsible for employing a Schools Support Services Officer. The staff who are available as part of this service include guidance officers, curriculum consultants, visiting teachers, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, psychologists, social workers and integration aides.

Visiting Teacher Service

In Victoria, the Department of Education and Training (DE&T) provides a Visiting Teacher Service. Visiting teachers (for visually, hearing and physically impaired students) provide additional educational assistance, advice and support to school age students, their parents, schools and school communities. They liaise with other professionals and work with students individually, over periods of time ranging from a few weeks to several years.

Primary Welfare Officer

The Primary Welfare Officer is an active member of the school's student wellbeing team. They support schools to strengthen a whole school approach to the wellbeing of students. They help the development of tailored programs to meet the individual needs, interests and abilities of 'at-risk' students.

Student Welfare Coordinators

Funds have been made available to all government secondary schools to employ Student Welfare Coordinators. They are responsible for helping students handle issues such as truancy, bullying, drug use and depression. They also work with other welfare professionals and agencies to address student needs.

Program for Students with Disabilities

The Program for Students with Disabilities supports the education of students with disabilities and additional learning needs in Victorian government schools by providing schools with additional resources. There are similar programs within the Catholic system and the independent system.

Who is eligible for the Students with Disabilities program?

Any Victorian government school student with a disability or a significant health condition and additional learning needs is eligible, provided they meet the eligibility criteria of one of these seven categories:

- Physical disability
- Visual impairment
- Severe behaviour disorder
- Hearing impairment

- Intellectual disability
- Autism spectrum disorder
- Severe language disorder and critical educational needs.

How is eligibility for the Students with Disabilities program determined?

To find out whether a student is eligible for the Program for Students with Disabilities, an 'educational needs' questionnaire must be completed. This looks at a number of things like mobility, fine motor skills, safety, medical issues and communication needs. Each of these is graded to give an overall summary of the student's abilities and needs. The overall score is used to determine the level of resources after eligibility has been established.

Aims of the Program Support Group

The aims of the Program Support Group (PSG) are to:

- Ensure that those who are responsible for the student, and who know them best, work together to establish shared goals for the student's educational future.
- Plan reasonable adjustments for the student to access the curriculum.
- Provide educational planning that continues throughout the student's school life.
- Monitor the progress of the student.

Members of the support group

The Program Support Group is usually made up of:

- The parent, guardian or carer of the student
- A parent, guardian or carer advocate
- A class teacher or teachers who have responsibility for the student
- The principal or their nominee
- The student (where appropriate).

What the support group does

The responsibilities of the Program Support Group include:

- Identifying the student's needs
- Deciding if adjustments need to be made to the curriculum
- Planning an appropriate educational program
- Developing an individual educational plan
- Discussing the program with teachers and providing support to implement the educational programs
- Providing advice to the principal about the extra educational needs of the student and the types of resources required to meet these needs
- Reviewing and evaluating the student's program on a regular basis, as determined by the group.

Royal Children's Hospital Education Institute

The Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) Education Institute works to achieve the best outcomes for all students in Victoria, including those with a health condition. The Institute brings together and passes on education and health knowledge to provide the best possible outcomes for students, schools and the community. This is done by:

- Forming collaborative partnerships with school systems, individual schools, teachers and families
- Providing support, information and advice to schools
- Conducting research and disseminating knowledge to inform decision makers
- Delivering training and professional development for people working with students who have a health condition.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- School principal
- Royal Children's Hospital
- Royal Children's Hospital Education Institute Tel. (03) 9322 5100
- Chronic Illness Peer Support, Centre for Adolescent Health, Royal Children's Hospital Tel. (03) 9345 6616
- Yooralla Independent Living Centre.

Things to remember

- There are a variety of support mechanisms available to assist schools and parents to effectively support students with a chronic illness.
- The principal of your child's school is the best person to ask about accessing these support mechanisms.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Royal Children's Hospital - Clinical support services

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