



Australian Government

Department of Families,
Housing, Community Services
and Indigenous Affairs

Better Start for Children with Disability initiative

Information for parents and carers

On 28 July 2010, the Australian Government announced new funding to provide services to children up to 15 years of age with a disability that affects their development.

Under the Better Start for Children with Disability (Better Start) initiative the identified disabilities are:

- cerebral palsy
- Down syndrome
- Fragile X syndrome, and
- moderate or greater vision or hearing impairments, including deafblindness.

Support for families with young children

Since 1 July 2011, children who are aged under six years and have been diagnosed with one of the listed disabilities have been able to be registered to access early intervention funding of up to \$12,000 (up to a maximum of \$6,000 per financial year).

The funding can be used to pay for early intervention services such as speech pathology, audiology, occupational therapy, orthoptics, physiotherapy and psychology. Families will have until the child's seventh birthday to access the early intervention funding.

This targeted early intervention during the pre-school years aims to complement existing Commonwealth and State and Territory services and to assist these children to have the best possible preparation for the transition to school.

Support for families with older children

In addition to the early intervention funding under Better Start, children with the listed disabilities (including those who are over the age of six) may be eligible for new Medicare items for:

- the development of a treatment and management plan for a child under 13 years of age by a specialist, consultant physician or general practitioner

- up to four diagnostic, treatment and management services delivered by psychologists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, audiologists, physiotherapists and orthoptists to assist the referring practitioner in the assessment, diagnosis and development of a treatment and management plan for a child under 13 years of age, and
- up to a total of 20 early intervention treatment services per child, consistent with the treatment and management plan, delivered by psychologists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, optometrists, audiologists, physiotherapists and orthoptists.

The new treatment items are available for children up to the age of 15 provided the treatment and management plan is in place before 13 years of age.

Parents and carers of eligible children are not required to complete a formal application to access the Medicare component of the initiative, but need to be referred by their general practitioner or a physician.

The Medicare component of the Better Start initiative is administered by the Department of Health and Ageing. Further information about the Medicare component of Better Start is available at

http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/children_disability

Support for families living in outer regional and remote areas

Families living in outer regional or remote areas may be eligible for a \$2,000 one-off support payment. This payment recognises the difficulties that families living in remote and outer regional areas face in accessing services and will assist with expenses such as travel and home visits.

Registering for the Better Start initiative

Parents or carers of eligible children need to register their child for Better Start before they turn six in order to access the early intervention funding.

The Better Start Registration and Information Service (RIS) is operated by Carers Australia.

To register your child for the Better Start initiative, please call the Carers Australia RIS on **1800 242 636**.

In order to register for the Better Start initiative families will need to provide proof of:

- the child's age (e.g. the child's birth certificate or passport)
- the child's residential address (e.g. a recent utilities bill or rates notice)
- the child's diagnosis
- residential status (if applicable), and
- the child's Centrelink generated Customer Reference Number (CRN).

Further information

For further information about the Better Start initiative, please visit www.fahcsia.gov.au/betterstart

Enquiries can also be directed to the Better Start Helpline on **1800 989 530** or emailed to Better.Start@fahcsia.gov.au