



Children and Young People  
with Disability Australia

# Children with disability – an essential focus of the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children?



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# Overview

- Children with disability – largely overlooked in The Framework
- Why Children with Disability should be a key focus of the National Framework – what the direct experience tells us.
- Future – Key considerations



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## About CYDA

- National peak body and representative persons organisation for children and young people with disability, aged 0 to 25 years
- Work to ensure the direct experiences of children and young people with disability informs policy and practice - Key activity is systemic advocacy
- Rights based/work reflects the social model of disability



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## About CYDA

- Core funding through the Department of Social Services
- 5500+ members nationally – majority families
- Extensive information is available at [www.cyda.org.au](http://www.cyda.org.au)



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# Children with disability – focus in the Framework to date

- Minimal initiatives and policy actions that refer specifically to children with disability – particularly the case in the 1<sup>st</sup> action plan
- 2<sup>nd</sup> action plan identifies disability as a “new priority” for the framework and includes some defined actions around disability that focus on the interface with disability services, including the NDIS, NDS and Out of Home Care however no details about how this will occur



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# Children with disability – focus in the Framework to date

- 2<sup>nd</sup> action plan also states the need to “(explore) evidence-based models of working with families where disability of the child or adult is impacting on the safety and wellbeing of children, including working with adult service providers.”
- 3<sup>rd</sup> action plan – specific focus within the consultation process on disability however scant reference to disability in the actual plan. Of particular note is that the strategy focus areas in the 3<sup>rd</sup> action plan are all issues of high relevance to CwD – ie high prevalence of CwD in aboriginal communities, out of home care, child safety in organisations



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# Context/Direct Experience

- Historically - disability hidden/medical model/rights based model but still a long way to go
- History of segregation – institutionalization/segregated settings (residential, schools, employment, housing and services) – PwD seen as others/”not equal citizens”
- Attitudes – dehumanization of PwD and low expectations
- Missed/limited opportunities – childhood very different from the outset for children with disabilities
- Children with disability often contextualized in a context of grief/burden/loss



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# Context/Direct Experience

- Abuse and harm are a reported common childhood experience in children with disability
- Broad and constant range of neglect/abuse and harm reported to CYDA clearly reflecting the need for “protection”
- Unacceptable often seen as acceptable for CwD

# Statistics/Research



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- Approx. 7% of children aged 0-17 year in Australia experience disability
- Most children with disability 0 to 14 (99.7%) live with their families
- Limited statistic re children with disability across the board – lack of quality prevalence data in Australia – and no national data on abuse/neglect prevalence

# Statistics/Research



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- International research suggests children and young people with disability 3 times more vulnerable to abuse than their peers
- Children and young people with high communication and behavior support needs have higher vulnerability again to abuse
- Children aged 0-12 years with disability had a lower representation in child care services -3.0% compared with their representation in the community in -6.6%. This was the case for both the 0-5 and 6-12 age groups.
- 41% of students with disability complete Year 12
- 52% of students with disability report experiencing bullying at school



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# The way forward

- The NDIS is not the magic wand for all issues of concern re disability
- Recognition the profound disadvantage that children with disability contend with → Strong advocacy for Inclusion of CwD as a key focus of the Framework
- Children with Disability are not separate business but core business



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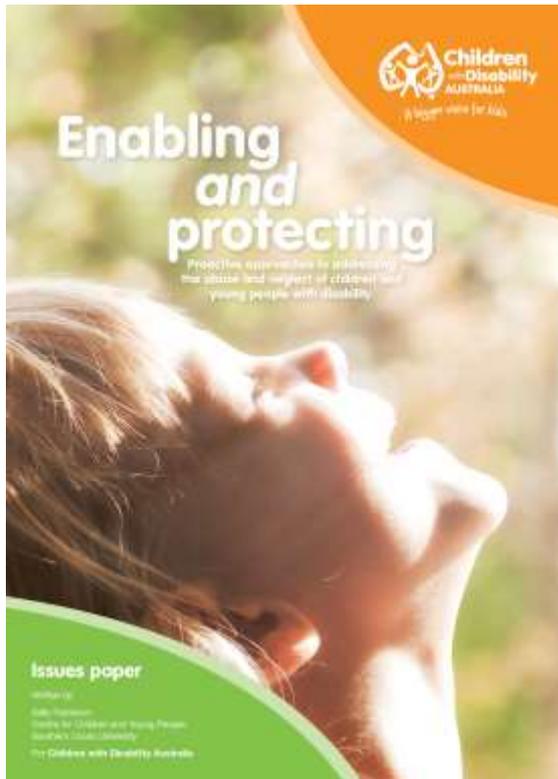
# The way forward

- View children with disability as children first, give specific consideration to impact of disability (societal attitudes and barriers )but don't segregate or define children by disability.
- Clear identification of actions/outcomes in future implementation plans

# Enabling and Protecting — Issues paper



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- Available in hard copy from CYDA
- Electronic version available at CYDA website  
<http://www.cyda.org.au/cda-issue-papers>

# What increases vulnerability?



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## ATTITUDES

- Common attitudes in the community position children and young people with disability as incapable, a burden, inferior, helpless or objects of pity
- Abuse is not recognised and different standards apply – it is ‘acceptable’ because the child or young person has a disability
- Abuse is justified and renamed as ‘behaviour management,’ OH&S, ‘an incident’
- Abuse is denied



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# What increases vulnerability?

## ATTITUDES

- Assumption that children and young people with disability don't understand and are not affected
- Communication support needs often mean the child or young person is not listened to
- Responses to abuse are inadequate
- Chronic devaluing and exclusion – abuse becomes the norm



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# Barriers to reporting abuse

- Abuse not recognised or effects minimised
- Segregation and isolation
- Dependency on others
- Accountability of organisations – actively encourage
- Access to justice and equality before the law

# Barriers to reporting abuse



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- Children and young people with communication and behaviour support needs:
  - difficulty articulating what happened
  - behaviour is wrongly attributed as manifestation of disability
- Minimal or no access to protective behaviours and sexuality education