

Chronic conditions and schooling

For parents and carers of children with chronic conditions

Navigating a chronic health condition can impact a child's school experience. This fact sheet provides information on how parents and carers can best support their child with a chronic condition through school. For additional useful information on schooling, visit the Australian Government's Department of Education website.

i In supporting students with chronic conditions, it is vital to work as a team with their teachers, healthcare professionals, administrators, and other education professionals. This team approach can ensure educational plans and school resources are optimised to best reflect your child's needs.

Note: this information is general in nature, as each Australian state and territory has different funding models and supports available. There will also be differences between public, private and independent school systems. This resource provides an overview of processes available to support your child within mainstream schooling. It also provides examples of other options available should they require alternative schooling.

Mainstream schooling

1 Develop a strong relationship with the school

Even before enrolling in a school, it can be a good idea to get in touch via phone, email or face-to-face to discuss your child and their specific needs. Schools have policies and procedures in place for students and their medical needs so you should ask for help and find out what assistance is available.

Remember schools and teachers are there for you, but they may not know anything about your child's condition or the accommodations they require. Even if they have experience teaching a child with the same chronic condition, each child is unique and may need different accommodations. Be sure to provide them with as much information as possible to ensure they are informed. Information can include medical reports, specialist letters, or information resources (e.g., websites, printouts, booklets and fliers).

Once your child is enrolled, always check the information that you gave the school has been passed on to their teacher. Even if it has, it is still worth scheduling a meeting with your child's teacher/s to ensure they are fully informed and have the opportunity to ask you any questions. This should be checked and redone every time your child gets a new teacher (e.g., at the start of a new school year).

Tip: emails can be a good way to be in contact because you will have a paper trail and can track interactions over time.

2 In partnership with the school, create a medical risk management plan

All schools have processes in place to create medical risk management plans. Typically, these are fairly generic in nature and may not be tailored to your child's medical condition. Just remember to include as much detail as possible. Your general practitioner or paediatrician may be required to sign off on this. The medical risk management plan should be reviewed as a team (e.g., with the school, parent or carer, and treating healthcare team) annually or if any changes in your child's condition occur.

Remember to keep in contact with the school if anything on your child's medical risk management plan changes (e.g., new medications).

Schools can often access funding for certain health conditions if staff need to be trained to manage a health condition. If needed, you should discuss this with the school.

Tip: if a Guidance Officer is available in the school, they may be able to assist with many aspects of your child's engagement. The role of Guidance Officers is to advocate, provide counselling, deliver individual student support and case manage. They usually work directly with students and families, and link in with teachers, other school personnel, other specialists and external support providers as required.

3 Individual education plans

If your child is struggling to access the curriculum, not keeping up or needs accommodations made regarding their learning, an individual education plan (IEP) may be created. The school should get in contact with you to organise a meeting should they think this is required. This meeting will give you an opportunity to discuss options with your child's teacher. These options could include curriculum adjustments or education assistant support. Another example of an accommodation is that for any days your child is absent from school, their teacher can implement strategies for home access to lesson resources to ensure continuity of learning. For more information on IEPs, visit allmeansall.org.au/iep-guide/.

4 Arrangements for assessments

If applicable, your child may be eligible for exemptions or considerations like extra time for exams or other assessments. These considerations should be discussed with the school and teacher.

5 Therapies

The school may be able to facilitate referrals to state-based government funded therapy services. Keep in mind that often the referral process for these services can be lengthy, and not all applications are approved.

i If your child can receive government funded therapy services or any private/ National Disability Insurance Scheme funded therapies, enquire with the school as to whether they will allow these therapy services to be onsite to avoid having to travel and/or have your child out of school to attend these sessions.

6 Grievance process

There may be times when you need to report on an issue with the management of your child and their condition at school. If possible, discuss this issue with your child's teacher, head of year level or the school principal.

If your grievance is not resolved, you may need to lodge the issue with a more senior authority. If it is a state school your state or territory government will have official complaints processes (google your state and school complaints processes to find the relevant procedures). If your complaint is about a non-government school, you will initially need to raise the complaint directly with the school.

Alternative schooling arrangements

Hospital schools work alongside the department of education in each state to help students access education while in hospital. This may include bedside schooling where a teacher will visit your child, or classrooms your child can visit which are typically located next to or on hospital grounds. You can ask your healthcare provider whether these are in your state.

Distance education is available to students who are unable to access mainstream schooling due to geographic location or for other reasons such as illness. There are both government and non-government services available.

Home schooling is an alternative to mainstream schooling for those who have capacity to educate their own children. Each state and territory have different requirements related to home schooling. You will need to apply to the education board in the state you reside to commence home schooling. For more information visit myhomeschool.com/au/

Alta-1 is a program which offers a unique and individualised approach to the education of young people, currently available only in Queensland and Western Australia. For more information visit italta-1.com.au/