

Better Start - A team Approach to achieve best outcomes for families

The philosophy behind the provision of Early Intervention is that services will be family centred, and families will determine the goals that are worked on.

In the past, all funding for Early Intervention services has been provided directly to organisations.

In line with family centred philosophy, government support is now moving to individualised funding, where families have more choice about how their early intervention money is used.

Better start is the beginning of this

Children with acuities of 6/18 or less can access \$12,000 up to the age of 7

What does this mean?

For families with Vision Australia, except for those in the trial areas accessing NDIS already, we are in a transition stage between block and individualised funding. Vision Australia receives an allocated block amount of funding from the government year and in addition to this is able to supply services through Better Start. Better Start is now another way that we receive funding.

Once families are registered with Better Start with us, their funds can be used to cover services for which we receive no funding – Orthoptic assessments and some Orientation and Mobility Services. Within Children's Services, all children are allocated a package of service. If additional services are required we can provide this with Better Start money.

What Vision Australia can offer –from VA web site

Vision Australia has a suite of Better Start programs that focus on the development of independence in a range of targeted areas e.g. school transition, early literacy, social skills, physical development and the acquisition and use of equipment and technology.

These programs complement existing Vision Australia's children's services and our staff work with families to develop an integrated service plan that successfully combines Better Start programs with existing services

Families can also choose to purchase services from external providers. Vision Australia provides the following information for families:

Purchasing Services from other Better Start Providers

Vision Australia understands that for various reasons some families may wish to purchase services from other Better Start providers. To help you choose an appropriate provider, we recommend that you consider the following key questions when making your choice:

- Does the provider have experience in working with children and families?*
- Does the provider have experience in vision impairment, especially in children?*
- Is the provider willing to develop a working relationship with other services or agencies that your family is involved with?*
- Is the provider likely to be able to establish a long term relationship with you and your child?*
- What are the provider's fees? How much Better Start Funding will be spent with this provider? Is there an up-front spending commitment? Are there any out of pocket expenses?*
- Is the provider able to offer flexible appointment times and locations, to potentially accommodate the child's childcare, pre-school or school setting if required?*

One of the highlights of the Better Start program is that as part of the \$12,000 allocated per eligible child, \$4,200 can be spent on equipment.

A condition is that this equipment has to fit with goals that the family is working on with their Key worker at Vision Australia.

Being able to access this money has meant that families are able to have at home, equipment which will support their child's learning. Children starting school can have the same equipment at home that is being used to assist them to access the curriculum at school

e.g. One mother commented that the CCTV purchased for her son "*is like his new eyes*". This family has limited financial resources and could not afford to purchase this equipment .

Another significant advantage is that Better Start has provided more opportunities for us to work closely with other professionals. Within VA, Children's Services staff now work more closely with Adaptive Technology Consultants and Orthoptists, in joint assessments to provide the best outcomes for families considering purchasing equipment

To support the child's transition to school ,the child's Department of Education and Training visiting teacher, the family and VA professionals can work together to consider what equipment may be most helpful for the family to have at home. This leads to the building of close links with the wider group of professionals involved in the child's life. This has been a very supportive experience for families.

(A panel discussion followed with videos and photos of children being assessed and also using equipment, and the exchange of experiences including the new NDIS program and it implementation)

Judy Reese
Early childhood Specialist Teacher
Vision Australia