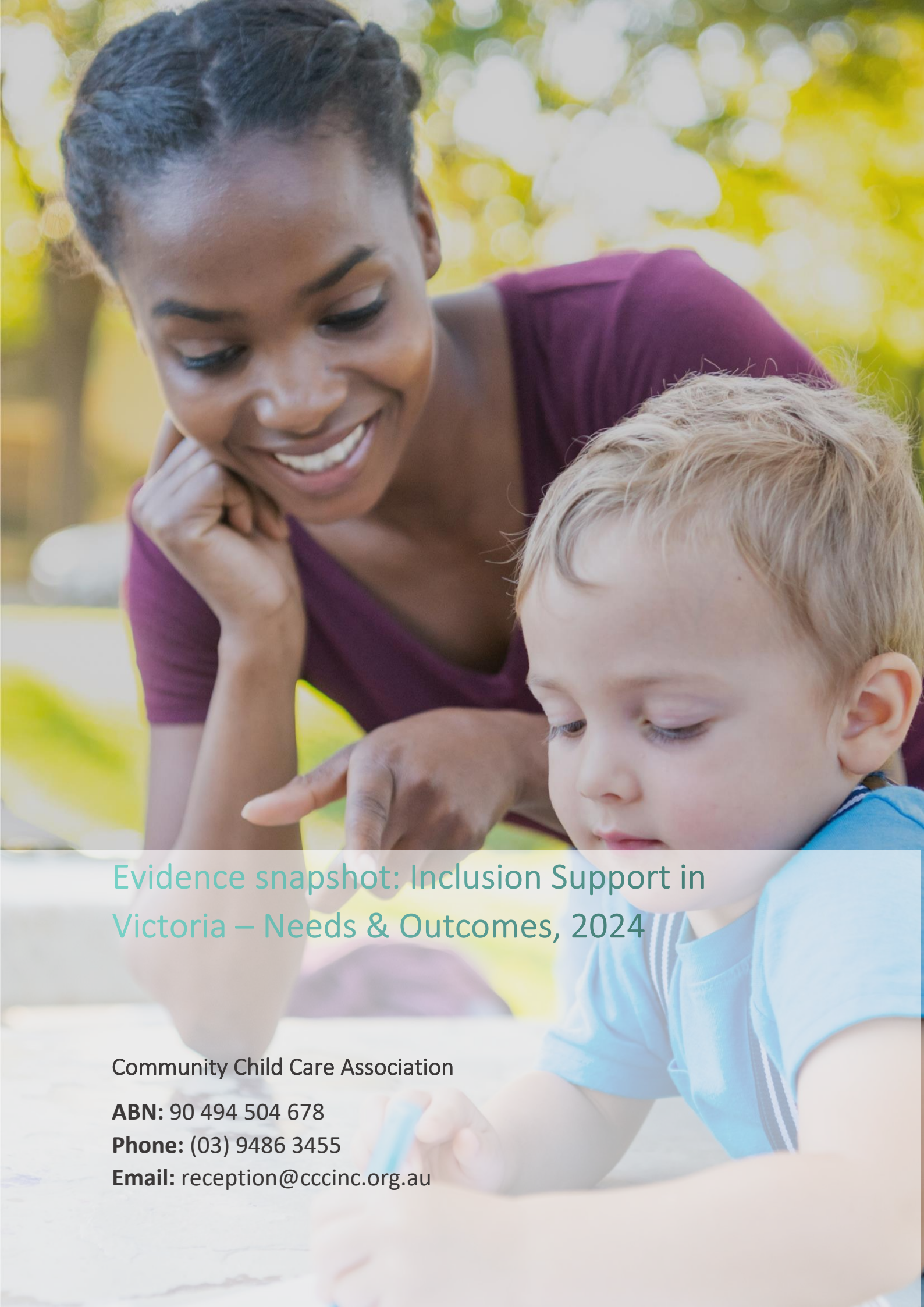




Evidence snapshot: Inclusion Support in Victoria – Needs & Outcomes, 2024

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Introduction

The Victorian Inclusion Agency (VIA) evidence snapshot presents findings from the VIA Services Surveys, conducted in 2017, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024. The VIA is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education to deliver the Inclusion Support Program (ISP) in Victoria. Community Child Care Association (CCC) has led the VIA since its establishment in 2016, delivering the program in consortium with KU Children's Services and Yooralla.

This document illustrates the growing need for services, the lack resources to address the inclusion needs, and the positive impact VIA is having on services' ability to support children who have additional needs.

VIA services survey

Education and care services across Victoria were invited to share their perspectives on inclusion needs since 2017 through an annual survey. This has provided important insights into state of need of the education and care sector in Victoria as well as impact the program is having on services. The 2024 annual survey was administered through SurveyMonkey on the 18th August and closed on the 17th September 2024, 510 education and care services across Victoria responded to the survey. Service leaders across education care service types in Victoria responded to the survey.

What are services' state of need?

Increased inclusion needs

Recent responses from services on changes in their enrolments of children with additional support needs, indicate that almost half of services (45 per cent in 2024) had more children enrolled with additional support needs compared to the previous year. Since 2020, services have increasingly reported they had **more children enrolled with additional support needs** compared to previous years, which has plateaued this year with similar rates to 2023 (48 per cent).

Lack of resources to meet the level of need

The VIA Services Survey includes questions about the provision and/or availability of additional supports and resources provided by their management. In 2024, almost a quarter (24 per cent) of services who reported they had more children with additional support needs also reported their staff and resourcing supports had decreased compared to previous years. With half of services (50 per cent) who reported they had more children with additional support in 2024 also reporting their staff and resourcing supports had remained the same. This suggests that the **higher level of inclusion support needs** some services are experiencing is **not being matched with an increased level of staff** and resourcing to support children with additional needs.

Barriers to Strategic Inclusion Planning

In the recent 2024 survey, service leaders predominantly commented on **workforce challenges, lack of experience and knowledge in Strategic Inclusion Planning, complex systems and time consuming process** as impacting their capacity and capability to develop Strategic Inclusion Plans (SIP).

“We have experienced some recruiting issues over the last 12 months and the co-ordinator and 2IC [second in charge] have been required on the floor a lot more.”

“Having a change in staffing and those knowledgeable in developing SIPs, therefore having to work through educating the new staff on how to develop the SIPs as they are very specific.”

“The time it takes to undertake writing and updating the SIP, using the platform is time consuming and requires so much evidence and rewording.”

Many services leaders commented on the **reliance on support from Inclusion Professionals (IPs)** to address some of the above barriers and assist in the developing of SIPs.

“We didn't really have a difficulty developing the SIP as our Inclusion Professional provided us support and guidelines in developing one.”

“We are really fortunate to have [our IP], I don't know how I would go doing all this without her.”

What impact is VIA having on services?

Increasing capability and capacity for inclusion

Vast majority of respondents (89 per cent) who had received IP support stated they had **made positive changes in inclusion practice and/or policy** as a result of the support from their IP. Primarily, services reported they had made inclusive changes to their education and teaching practices (65 per cent), in their internal environments (52 per cent), and to their Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) (52 per cent). In 2024, over half of respondents had made over 4 different changes.

“We are working as a service to increase our use of visual communication and key word signing - we had support from [our IPs] with this and I was able to share with the whole service through a staff meeting and add it to the QIP.”

“We will be making changes to our physical environments and teaching practices as a result of information received from our Inclusion Professional. Suggestions and info from [our IP] is also prompting critical reflection in our educator team, and provided us with valuable info that we can use during discussions with families re: individual children's needs.”

Services were asked whether inclusion support enabled them to support families who require an increase in their days or hours. In 2024, over a third of applicable respondents (38 per cent) reported that **they were able to offer more hours to families**. Almost one-in-five (19 per cent) reported that they were **able to offer more days**. However, more than half of services reported that inclusion support did not enable

them to increase access to education and care, which has steadily increased since 2021 (37 per cent in 2021 to 55 per cent in 2024).

Need for increased inclusion support

Services were asked whether they had comments or suggestions about the VIA assistance. Prominent themes across services in Victoria were the **appreciation of support and IP expertise** and **the need for increased IP support**. This highlighted a deep sense of gratitude for a much needed support, with services shouting out for more access to supports to address their inclusion needs.

“The training session, resources, and support provided by VIA have been incredibly valuable in helping family day care services enhance their inclusive practices.”

“[Inclusion Professional], through VIA, has been an invaluable resource for maintaining our SIP, accessing funding and navigating the Inclusion Support Portal. I couldn't have managed without her.”

“We would love more contact face to face by the VIA Professional to visit sites rather than all the online emails, zoom or phone calls.”

“I would love to see the [IP's] time spent on visits that focused on passing on their knowledge and expertise regarding inclusion (perhaps speaking to our staff as a group) rather than mostly applying for funding.”

Many services also commented on the **need to simplify the complex inclusion support systems and lengthy funding processes**, to reduce admin burden and wait times for inclusion funding.

“The process took 7 months to be approved. Which is far too long when the centre is needing support. The process should not be so in depth and wordy.”

“Funding needs to be processed and approved faster so that we can include children earlier.”

Case studies: Support from Inclusion Professionals

229 service leaders provided rich anecdotes about when and how Inclusion Professionals supported their service to include children with high support needs. Their anecdotes highlighted the **high level of expertise** Inclusion Professionals bring within a **collaborative and strength-based approach to connect and support services include children** with wide range and complex needs.

We asked them:

1. Can you tell us about a time when your Inclusion Professional assisted your service to include a child/children with high support needs?
2. How has your Inclusion Professional helped your service to address barriers that may have prevented children and their families accessing your service and program?
3. What are some examples of resources and strategies that your Inclusion Professional provided to improve inclusion at your service?

Centre Director in a Long Day Care (LDC) service

Our Inclusion Professional is a highly valued and knowledgeable educator. They were able to assist our service to prepare and welcome a child with significant needs. The IP worked closely with the educators to assess the child's needs so that the child can engage more meaningfully within the room whilst still meeting the needs of the other children as well.

Our IP has helped our different teams address barriers by looking at their environments and what was already in place and providing them with insightful guidance and a fresh outlook.

Working with the strengths of the educators and building on their capacity to create and promote an inclusive environment, collaborating with other professionals and collaborations with the family, individualised planning, visual aids, schedules, strength-based approach, accessing other services and or allied or medical services.

Service Coordinator in an Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) service

Our [IP] has been very helpful to support our team to develop and build their understanding of trauma and how this can impact a child's behaviours, she has helped us understand barriers, implement strategies and actions into our service.

Our [IP] has provided many opportunities to attend network meetings, linked us with other professional development in our local area and provided support personally by holding meetings with our team online and in person to further develop our understanding of the barriers that can affect families and children.

Our [IP] has provided us with many visual resources, fact sheets to support staff and families understand the IDFM and how it is used, provided mentoring and support on how to understand what barriers our service has and how to develop strategies and actions. She has spent time with staff to support them to further develop their knowledge and understanding of inclusion and inclusive practices.

Centre Director in a LDC service

Our [IP] is engaging and asks questions of all key stakeholders to support inclusion - she attended a family inclusion meeting and enable barriers to be discussed and addressed and workable solutions implemented.

Our [IP] has a wealth of experience and engages with professionals at the service in a collaborative and communitive manner - she actively listens to Educators and the child's families, making connections and suggestions on practical ways to support wholistic inclusion - facilitating workable solutions. Our [IP] also follows up to support ongoing connections and this is incredibly helpful.

Viewing ideas from a different perspective. Raising provocations for us to think about. Addressing individual and collective concerns. Support with Portal and SIP navigation.