



Impact of COVID-19 remote learning on Victorian students with disability

School systems around the world faced significant challenges as the COVID-19 pandemic struck in early 2020. The Australian state of Victoria, experienced some of the longest stay at home orders in the world.

This project explored the lived experiences of remote learning for students with disability and their families in Victoria during this period of disruption between 2020 and 2021.

Research Method

Victorian families who self-identified having students with disability were invited to participate in a series of interviews conducted via zoom. Most participants were recruited through Children and Young People with Disabilities Australia's (CYDA) membership.



12 families of students with disability in metropolitan Melbourne participated in this project



3 rounds of interviews took place over the course of remote learning in 2020 and 2021

Timeline



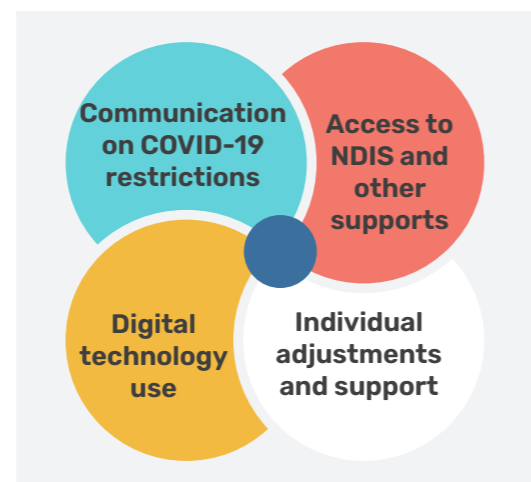
Impacts and Influencing factors



Students with disability
Impacts: learning, well-being, social skills and relationships



Families
Impacts: mental health, work-life balance and gender roles



Research Findings

Impact on Students with Disability

Remote learning **exacerbated pre-existing challenges** of individualised accommodation and support. Parents reported that their children effectively **lost a year of learning and development**, particularly impacting students transitioning into and out of secondary school.

The loss of school routine and structure **increased stress and anxiety** levels among many students. However, access to **quiet learning spaces and flexibility with learning** at home reduced physical fatigue and improved mental well-being.

Parents reported a regression in social skills and **increased difficulties with social interactions** when schools reopened.

Impact on Families

Parents described feeling frustrated, tired, and trapped because of **increased responsibilities** around remote learning and **lack of regular formal and informal support** during the pandemic.

Loss of work-life balance often resulted in parents choosing between supporting students' learning, well-being and completing work-related tasks.

The responsibility of remote learning mostly fell on mothers, impacting on their ability to work.

While some families reported **strained relationships** among household members, some reported **opportunities for better bonding and positive relationships**.



"Schools are supposed to be diverse and inclusive, and I think they are, but they don't really display it at a time like this when extra needs may need to be accommodated."

Parent of a secondary student

Recommendations



Include students with disability in emergency preparedness, responses and communications.



Improve the capacity and resourcing of schools to provide quality and individualised teaching to students with disability.



Invest in additional supports for students with disability to catch up on lost learning and social opportunities.



Offer tailored mental health support for students with disability and their families during and post crises.



Provide additional support to students with disability and their families to access and utilise digital technology.



Improve guidance on utilising NDIS funding and other supports during emergencies.