

## Rationale

SDN believes that all children have a right to apply to access and participate in our services; and SDN recognises that at certain times people face barriers that make accessing services difficult, and therefore experience disadvantage leading to inequality. SDN also recognises that as a result of past and ongoing experiences of colonisation Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities experience particular disadvantage.

Equal rights to access are a commitment to social justice and fairness demonstrated by identifying barriers and implementing strategies that overcome these barriers and address inequality.

This policy outlines SDN’s approach to prioritising applications for places in our services , supporting the participation of children and families who may be experiencing disadvantage. It sets out how SDN meets its responsibilities to enable equal access in accordance with our mission, values, all relevant legislation and mandatory requirements.

## Scope

This policy applies to all SDN services.

## Key Terms

### Eligibility for access

Means a person has met specific required conditions that relate to a specific service. To apply and to be considered for a place, eligibility criteria must be met. To have access to SDN services, children and/or families must be eligible. This means satisfying the specific conditions that apply to each service type.

### Priority of access

Means the order in which eligible applicants for places are offered places in SDN services.

## Policy

Priority of access decisions will sit within the context of SDN’s Pathways Approach from first contact with SDN through to transition out of SDN, as well as pathways within SDN.

Information about eligibility criteria and SDN Priority of Access criteria will be made available to families and other service providers working with families.

Only eligible children/families can have an application for a place considered.

All eligible families that apply for access to an SDN service will have their application assessed against SDN Priority of Access criteria. All offers of a place in SDN services will strictly adhere to the SDN Priority of Access criteria.

All services will follow the SDN *Priority of Access Procedure* at all times when offering places, including in circumstances when a waiting list is required. This procedure has been developed to ensure the service complies with relevant State/Territory and Federal laws and regulations.

No child is placed on a waiting list under any circumstances before having their Priority level assessed and evidenced.

Children who meet the criteria for Priority1 (a child identified as being at risk of harm) will **not** be placed onto a waiting list. They will be supported to access an appropriate service, whether this is an SDN service or a non-SDN service.

Teams around a child will be formed to support access to SDN services when families are facing particular challenges.

On rare occasions, exceptional circumstances may arise where a family with a child already enrolled requires additional days of care due to a family crisis/emergency. Priority of access for families in these circumstances will be approved by the Director of Integrated Services.

### SDN priority of access criteria

Access is prioritised based on a weighted score before the length of time a child/family waits for a placement is taken into account. Where there is more than one child with the same weighted score, the application date (indicating the length of time the family has waited for the place) will contribute to who is allocated the first available place within this group.

### SDN Children's Education and Care Centres

Children will be assessed as priority 1, 2 or 3 for SDN Children's Education and Care Centres as follows:

- **Priority 1**

Children who are identified as being at risk of harm.

Siblings of children who are already identified as Priority 1 will be automatically considered to be Priority 1 themselves, regardless of other indicators.

Siblings of children who are Priority 1 and in the service already will be weighted higher than children who are Priority 1 and do not have a sibling already in the service.

- **Priority 2**

Children of parents who both satisfy the work/training/study test under Section 14 of the '*A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999*' (or equivalent) and sole parents who satisfy this test.

In addition or alternatively, children who meet the priority of access criteria specified by the service specification or contract specific to that service provision.

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- **Priority 3**

Any other child.

### SDN Preschools

The NSW Department of Education requires community preschool services to give equal priority of access to the children identified below as Priority 1. However, preschools should also consider the community needs of the preschool when allocating places:

- **Priority 1**

Children who are at least 4 years old on or before the 31 July in that preschool year and not enrolled or registered at a school

Children who are at least 3 years old on or before 31 July and from low income and Aboriginal families

Children with English Language needs

Children with disabilities

Children who are at risk of significant harm (from a child protection perspective).

Siblings of children who are already identified as Priority 1 will be automatically considered to be Priority 1 themselves, regardless of other indicators.

Siblings of children who are Priority 1 and in the service already will be weighted higher than children who are Priority 1 and do not have a sibling already in the service.

- **Priority 2**

Any other child.

### SDN services other than Children's Education and Care Centres and Preschools

Children will be assessed as Priority 1 or 2 for SDN services other than children's education & care centres and preschools:

- **Priority 1**

Children who are identified as being at risk of harm.

Siblings of children who are already identified as Priority 1 will be automatically considered to be Priority 1 themselves, regardless of other indicators.

Siblings of children who are Priority 1 and in the service already will be weighted higher than children who are Priority 1 and do not have a sibling already in the service.

- **Priority 2**

Any other child, applying the priorities specific to that funded service.

### SDN priority of access weighting criteria

Within each of these priorities, children will be ranked in order as follows:

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1. siblings of children who are in the service already
2. children in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
3. children who are applicants to Australia’s refugee and humanitarian programme
4. children who have a disability or delay in development
5. children in families which include a disabled person
6. children of SDN staff members (access for a new SDN staff person’s child is based on a vacancy becoming available, not by making a vacancy, nor through a temporary waiver)
7. children in families which include an individual whose adjusted taxable income does not exceed the lower income as per the current ATO low income thresholds or who or whose partner are on income support
8. children from a culturally and linguistically diverse background. This includes children who have at least one parent or carer who was born overseas in a non-English speaking country or for whom English is their second language
9. children in socially isolated families
10. children of sole parents.

## Related SDN Documents

### Policies

- GI-HLP-1.04: Equity, Social Justice and Social Inclusion
- GI-HLP-1.05: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement

## Relevant Legislation/Regulations

- Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992
- Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986
- Racial Discrimination Act 1975
- Racial Hatred Act 1995
- A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999 (*or equivalent*)
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
  - Schedule 1: National Quality Standard, elements 6.1.1, 6.3.3 and 7.3.2

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**Other References/Related Documents**

- Department of Education – <http://education.gov.au/>
- NSW Department of Education – Start Strong Community Preschool Guidelines
  - Child Care Service Handbook 2012-2013 for all Child Care Benefit approved child care services operating under the Child Care Management System (CCMS)
  - <http://education.gov.au/priority-allocating-places>

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