

Parenting Today in Victoria

10 years of insights Parenting
a child with disability



The Parenting Today in Victoria survey is supported by the Victorian Government





Acknowledgement of Country

The Parenting Research Centre acknowledges and respects the diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of this country and the Elders of the past and present.

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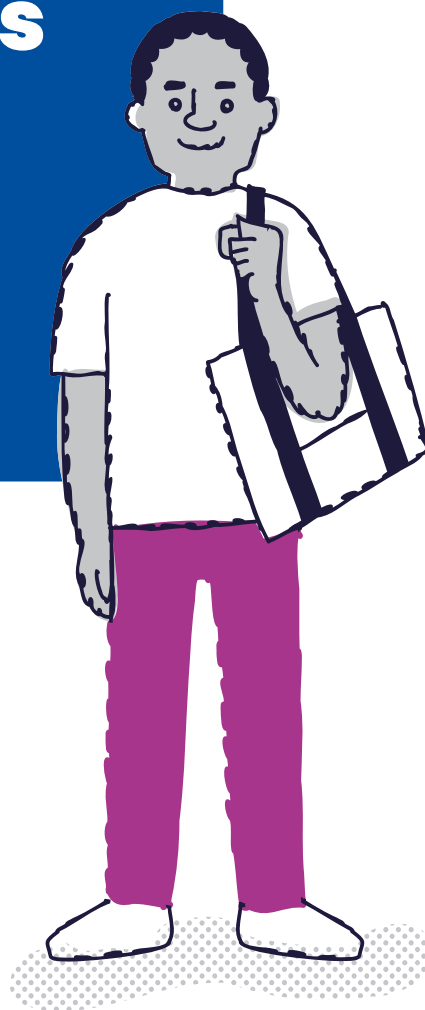
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A snapshot of parenting in Victoria, with a focus on parents of children with disability



Evidence to inform Thriving Kids

Providing timely, relevant support to families of children with low to moderate disability support needs sits at the core of the Thriving Kids system of disability supports, which is scheduled for national rollout from October 2026. Insights from the Parenting Today in Victoria survey shed important light on the preferences and support needs of families who are eligible for Thriving Kids supports.

A snapshot of parenting children with disability: Findings from 10 years of the Parenting Today in Victoria survey

The 2025 Parenting Today in Victoria survey provides a comprehensive and contemporary snapshot of the experiences, attitudes, and wellbeing of Victorian parents and carers.¹

As the fourth cross-sectional survey of Victorian parents, this survey builds on previous iterations (2016, 2019, and 2022) to offer valuable insights into how parenting in Victoria is evolving over time. Now with four waves of the survey, we can highlight important changes in parenting experiences over the last 10 years.

Understanding what parents need and how they're supported

By doing this periodic check-in with a representative sample of Victoria's parents, we're able to better understand how parents are faring, the parenting practices being used in the community, how parents are accessing and using services, and how we might be able to strengthen and improve the supports we offer parents. With a large representative sample of parents, we can focus on demographic groups of interest and report on their experiences.

¹ Note: the word "parents" in this brief is inclusive of anyone playing a parenting role for the focus child in the Parenting Today in Victoria survey, including family, carers and kin.

The findings presented in this snapshot are about parents with a focus child aged from birth to 8 years of age (inclusive) who has a disability



How disability is defined in this report

When parents respond to the Parenting Today in Victoria survey, they are asked to keep a particular child in mind. The 'focus child' for the survey is their child whose birthday occurred most recently.

The definition of disability we use in this report is parent-reported 'intellectual disability, developmental delay, sensory and/or speech conditions, learning difficulties, and/or autism'.² This definition for disability allows comparison over the four waves of the Parenting Today in Victoria survey. However, it is important to acknowledge that the definition likely doesn't capture all the nuance that we now recognise as 'disability' or 'complex needs'.

It is also worth noting that the children with disability in our analyses may include children eligible for NDIS (high needs, low functioning).

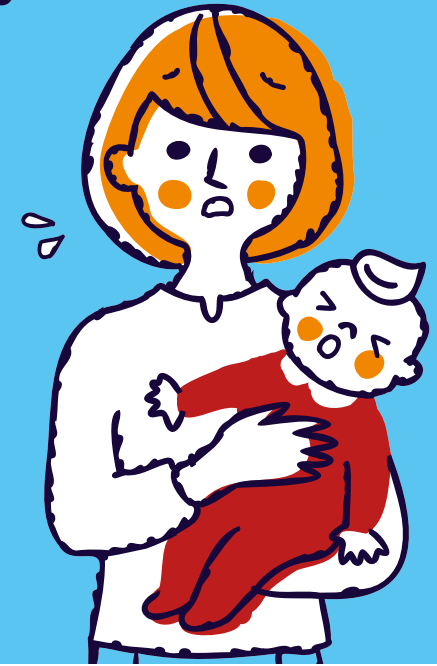
And, where we compare parents whose focus child has a disability to parents whose focus child does not have a disability, it is possible that, in either scenario, there may be another child (other than the 'focus child') in the house with a disability.

Bearing these considerations in mind, the following tables compare parenting experiences across the four survey waves for parents whose focus child has a disability and those whose focus child does not. Sample sizes for the disability group were n=86 (2016), n=180 (2019), n=157 (2022), and n=207 (2025). Corresponding sample sizes for the non-disability group were n=1,113 (2016), n=1,203 (2019), n=1,193 (2022), and n=1,385 (2025).

The four-wave findings should be interpreted as descriptive comparisons rather than statistically confirmed trends.

² The definition of disability used here is narrower than the 'complex needs' definition that is used in the Parenting Today in Victoria 2025 Technical Report. The complex needs definition in the Technical Report also includes physical/medical and emotional/behavioural conditions for children aged 0–18. The Parenting Today in Victoria 2025 Technical Report does not contain the disability-by-wave breakdowns reported in this snapshot.

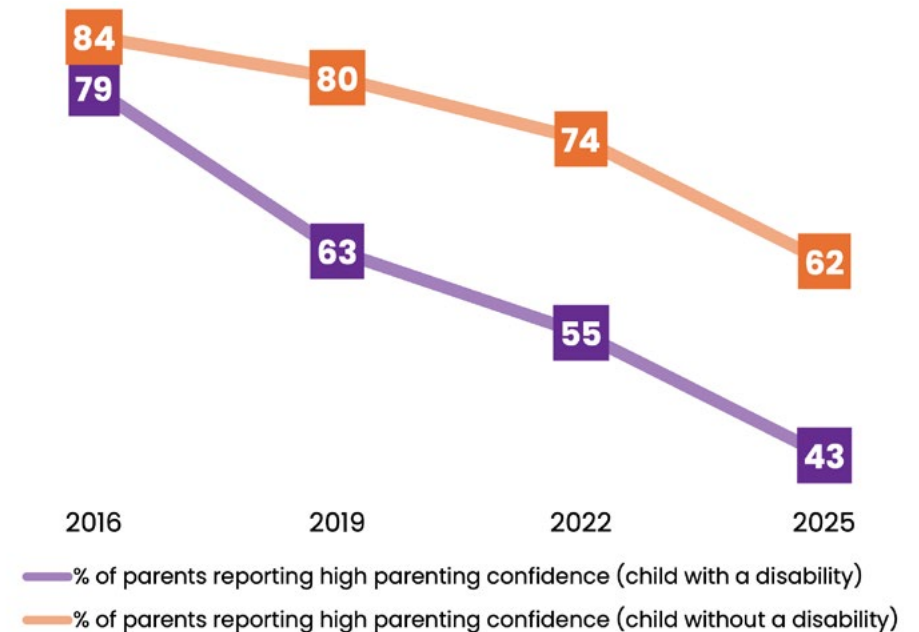
Parents are feeling less confident...



Parents reporting high parenting confidence has decreased across time*

While there has been a consistent pattern of decline in parent confidence over time, this decline is more pronounced for parents of children with disability. The gap between parents of children with and without disability has widened over the past 10 years.

*Using the Me as a Parent Scale – Short Form (MaPaS-SF)



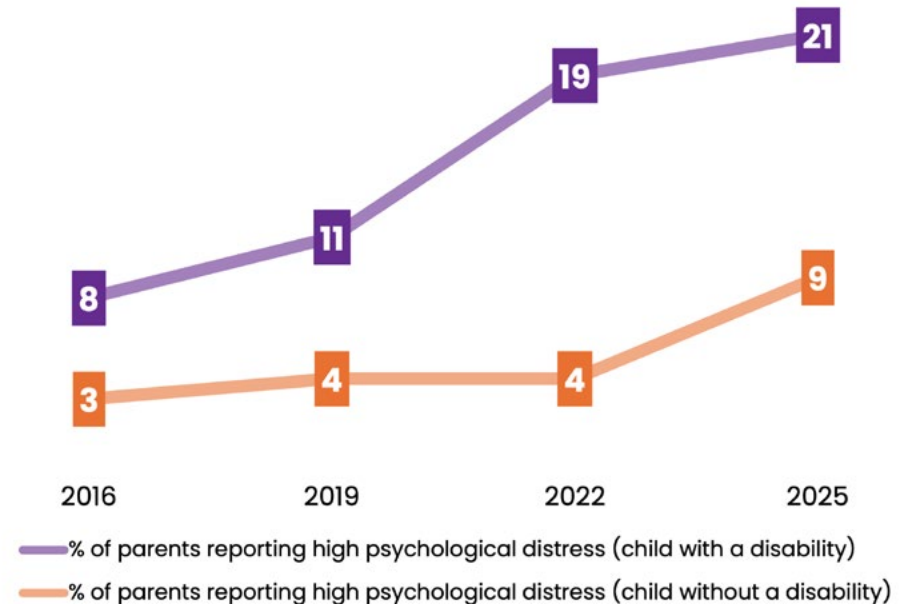
...and more distressed.



Parent reports of high psychological distress have increased over time*

While the trend shows approximately a threefold increase in high distress over the decade for both groups, high parental distress is especially evident in families with children with disability.

*Using the Kessler6 measure of psychological distress

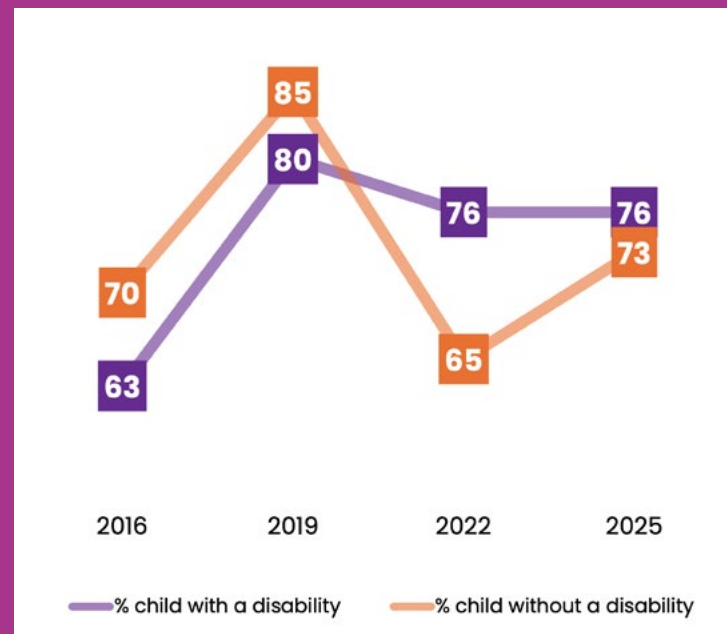


Most parents feel confident and comfortable accessing support.

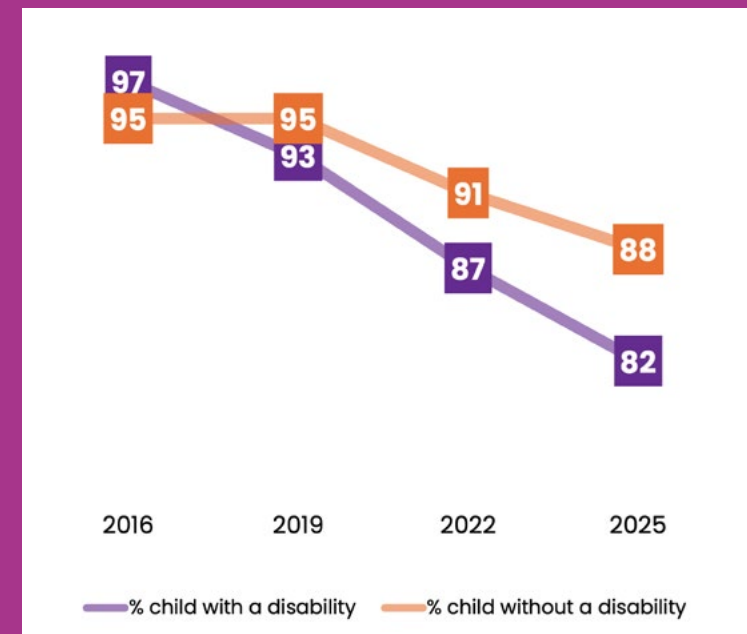
We can build on this strength.

*Note that there were slight wording changes in this question across survey waves

Confidence seeking help from professionals*



Comfort talking to child's educators



Parents of children with disability know where to go to access support...

2025 data also shows...

80%
said they were
confident in
recognising if
their child was
developing
mental health
problems

76%
said that
they know
where to go
for support
with their
child's
behavioural
or emotional
difficulties

79%
reach out
to friends
or other
parents

68%
talk to early
childhood
education and care
staff, or teachers

85%
look
online

65%
ask General
Practitioners
(GPs)



...however, not all had their needs met

63%
of parents of
children with
disability
reporting
satisfaction with
the support they
received

15%
reported feeling
blamed, judged or
criticised by the
professionals who
they saw for
their child's
behavioural
difficulties

65%
report using
social media
when looking
for information
online...

...however, only **6%** report
they are very confident
in the reliability of the
information they find on
social media.

52%
used general
parenting
information
websites...

...with podcasts and
parenting apps used by
a smaller but still notable
number (39% and 29%,
respectively).



When choosing which online resources to use, parents prioritise credibility and expertise over format or convenience.

82%
of parents of
children with a
disability chose
content made
by a qualified
professional

75%
said they value
resources
from a credible
organisation.

The use of online information and resources to support parenting is broadly similar among parents of children with and without disability, with both groups drawing on a mix of digital sources.



Parents of children with disability show a high level of engagement with parenting programs and peer support offerings.

27%
said they had
attended an
in-person
parenting
program

27%
had participated
in an online
parenting
program in the
past 12 months...

...with **31%** likely to
participate in a parenting
program in future

There are barriers to attending...

50%
said they
wanted to attend
programs but
were unable to...

...compared to **28%** of
parents of children without
disability.

51%	Program offered at inconvenient time
61%	Do not have time due to caregiver responsibilities
39%	Could not afford program cost
34%	Program offered at inconvenient location
36%	Do not have time due to paid work responsibilities
24%	Own mental health/distress
18%	Could not access/afford travel to program location
20%	Need to focus on other areas of concern (e.g. financial stress, housing)
12%	Worried about parenting being judged
8%	Did not feel welcome or that program was aimed at them
8%	Not having reliable internet

Summary



These findings from the Parenting Today in Victoria survey provide important guidance on what might work to support families of young children with disability.

Timely and relevant support for families of children with low to moderate disability support needs related to developmental delay or autism is at the heart of Thriving Kids. These needs may include developmental delay, intellectual disability, and learning, sensory, communication, and autism-related conditions.

Findings from the Parenting Today in Victoria survey offer valuable insights into the preferences and support needs of families who may be eligible for Thriving Kids supports, as well as those with higher needs. These insights can guide the design of Thriving Kids.

Parents of children aligned with Thriving Kids are not disengaged nor reluctant to seek help.

They are actively navigating multiple sources of support, engaging with professionals, participating in parenting programs and seeking out peer connection.

Their experiences, however, highlight some frictions that may impact on the effectiveness, accessibility and acceptability of existing pathways of support.

Findings indicate that while there is substantial unmet demand for parenting programs, parents face multiple intersecting practical, financial and psychosocial barriers that limit participation.

There is also an opportunity for initiatives such as Thriving Kids to fill the credibility gap in online spaces, where parents seem to be going for information albeit with very little trust in what they find, especially on social media.



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