## 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 in accordance with our purpose, values, all relevant legislation and mandatory requirements.

## Scope

This policy, and its associated documents, applies to the entirety of SDN Children's Services and the entirety of its wholly owned subsidiaries.

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.

| Minor/legislative amendment or modification history | Details: |
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## Policy

Priority of access decisions will be made 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 relevant SDN Priority of Access criteria. All offers of a place in SDN services will adhere to the SDN Priority of Access criteria. However, SDN reserves the right to exercise discretion depending on individual cases or extenuating circumstances.

All services will follow the *Priority of Access to SDN Services Policy* at all times when offering places in line with SDN's enrolment procedure and any other relevant policies and procedures.

Access for a child or family will be based on a vacancy becoming available, not by making a vacancy, nor through a temporary waiver, unless the child is at risk or other exceptional circumstances.

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

Where possible, children who meet the criteria for Priority 1 (a child identified as being at risk of harm) will **not** be placed onto a waiting list, and 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 Head of Services.

## SDN priority of access criteria

The intention of the policy is to ensure that the children most in need of access to services are given priority based on a weighted scoring system outlined below. Where there is more than one child with the same weighted score, the following two criteria will contribute to who is allocated the first available place within this group:

- siblings of children who are already in the service

- the application date (indicating the length of time the family has waited for the place).

### SDN Children's Education and Care Centres

Children will be assessed for SDN Children's Education and Care Centres as follows:

1. Children who are identified as being at risk of harm are **Priority 1**. Siblings of children who are currently identified as Priority 1 will be automatically considered to be Priority 1 themselves, regardless of other indicators.

2. Children who belong to one or more of the following groups, in order of priority:

   - children in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

   - children who have a disability or delay in development

   - children who are applicants to Australia's refugee and humanitarian program

   - 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)

   - siblings of children currently enrolled in the service.

3. Children who meet the priority of access criteria specified by a contract specific to that service provision, for example, if parents are employed by or studying at an institution which SDN is partnering with to provide services.

   a. Specifically in relation to SDN managed services **(UNSW & Macquarie Park)**

   b. UNSW employed employees, enrolled students and UNSW Affiliates as outlined in the UNSW/SDN management agreement

   c. Randwick Health and Innovation Precinct employees as outlined in the UNSW/SDN management agreement

   d. Optus Group Employees and children of Optus Group Contractors as outlined in the Optus /SDN management agreement.

4. Children in families which include a disabled person.

5. 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 whose partner is on income support.

6. 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.

7. Children in socially isolated families.

8. A child of a single parent who satisfies, or 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).*

9. 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 before any other groups, including non-equity three-year-old children. However, the particular needs of the community are also relevant, and therefore within the group of Priority 1 children for mainstream preschools, SDN will follow the same order of priority for eligible children as outlined above for SDN Children's Education and Care Centres.

## 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/or Aboriginal families

- Children with English Language needs

- Children with disability and additional needs

- 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.

## Priority 2

- Any other child.

## SDN Funded Programs and Children's Therapies

Subject to specific contractual requirements and eligibility criteria, children and families will be assessed for services other than children's education & care centres and preschools as outlined below:

## 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.

## Priority 2

Children who belong to one or more of the following groups, in order of priority:

- Children in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

- Children who have a disability or delay in development

- Children who are applicants to Australia's refugee and humanitarian program

- Siblings of children currently enrolled in the service.

## Priority 3

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

## Related SDN Documents

### Policies

- GI-HLP-1.04: Equity, Social Justice and Social Inclusion
- GI-HLP-1.05: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement
- SD-OP-2.07: Enrolment, Orientation and Transition into SDN Services

### Procedures

- SD-PRO-2.07-01: Enrolment, Orientation and Transition into SDN Services

## 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
- National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013
- National Standards for Disability Services
- NDIS Practice Standards and Quality Indicators

## Other References/Related Documents

Child Care Provider Handbook [Child Care Provider Handbook - Department of Education, Australian Government](#)

Australian Government Department of Education [Department of Education](#)

NSW Department of Education – Start Strong Community Preschool Guidelines [2024 Start Strong for Community Preschools program guidelines](#)