An Australian and New Zealand review of education support for children with chronic health conditions.
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This report was prepared by Dr Liza Hopkins on behalf of The Royal Children’s Hospital Education Institute.

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Executive summary

Introduction
Education support for students who miss school due to a health condition is an essential component of a holistic or child- and family-centred model of care. Yet the provision of education to children absent from school both during hospitalisation and during periods of recovery at home has been characterised by lack of policy direction, fragmented services and disconnection between education systems and health care systems. As medical care improves and rates of some chronic illnesses also increase, ever increasing numbers of children and young people are living with chronic health conditions which may necessitate frequent, regular or long term absence from school. Ensuring these students are not disadvantaged educationally is a challenge for both the education and health care sectors.

The project
This report describes the findings of a recent research project into the nature of education support to students with health conditions across Australia and New Zealand. Due to the diversity of settings in which such support is delivered, the nature of the education support system and the paucity of relevant policy across the jurisdictions in this region, the research focussed on the provision of education support to students in hospital. In some jurisdictions the hospital based education support extends to home and community care settings as well, while in other states hospital schools and education services are restricted to the hospital setting. For these reasons the findings of the project are presented on a national and state by state basis.

The project explores primary data obtained through interviews with key personnel in health-care and hospital-based education settings across Australia and New Zealand, as well as presenting preliminary findings of a web-search for relevant policy documents and details. The report takes a descriptive approach to the data collected, in order to explore the similarities and differences in the models employed across different jurisdictions. The project also involved a brief review of the relevant literature, to help identify the elements of good practice in education in health care settings.

Key findings
The project identified a number of elements which were common to education support services for students in hospital across Australia and New Zealand, including:

- Education support for long stay hospital inpatients either in classrooms or ward based services for students confined to bed
- Support for siblings of inpatients as needed, including referrals to enrolment in local schools
- Liaison with home schools for long stay patients for curriculum, assessment and reporting purposes
- Provision of support to school aged students regardless of whether they are enrolled in government or non-government schools.
In addition to these common features the following issues were commonly identified as pertinent, although managed in different ways in different settings:

- Provision of education support during periods of recovery at home
- Implementation of the national curriculum in Australia
- Distinguishing between students with mental health and medical health conditions
- Eligibility criteria for service
- Use of digital technology to connect students with their regular school
- Liaison between the hospital and the regular school.

In conclusion, the report draws together the findings of the primary research with the published evidence from the literature review to present the elements of a model of good practice which best supports the educational needs of students living with chronic health conditions.