

2021 FREE KINDERGARTEN FEES POLICY

Mandatory – Quality Area 7



Guidance for this template:

The Free Kindergarten 2021 Fees Policy template should only be reviewed, tailored and adopted by service provider's that have opted in to the Victorian Government's 2021 Free Kindergarten initiative.

This template is only a guide and service providers must ensure they tailor it to meet their operational requirements if they do choose to use it for the time that Free Kinder is in place before returning to their alternate Fee Policy.

PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- free kindergarten subsidies for funded sessional kindergarten programs
- reduced fees for children enrolled in a funded kindergarten program in a long day care centre and for children attending unfunded three-year-old programs in sessional kindergarten services.
- the application of surplus funding within [Service Name] ensuring it is only used to ensure the quality of program delivery and development of children enrolled in the service
- the setting, payment and collection of (additional hours fees/gap fee for unfunded 3-year-old kindergarten, or long day-care parent fees minus the \$2000 offset).
- ensuring the viability of [Service Name], by setting appropriate (additional hours fees/ gap fee for unfunded 3-year-old kindergarten/ long day-care parent fee minuses the \$2000 offset)

POLICY STATEMENT

1. VALUES

[Service Name] is committed to:

- supporting the Victorian Government's 2021 Free Kindergarten initiative
- increasing access to quality kindergarten programs for all Victorian children
- ensuring there are no financial barriers for families wishing to access an early childhood program for their child/children

- maintaining confidentiality in relation to the financial circumstances of parents/guardians

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to the Approved Provider, Person with Management and Control, Nominated Supervisor, Person in Day-to-Day Charge, educators and parents/guardians with an enrolled child, or who wish to enrol a child at [Service Name].

3. BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

Background

In response to the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the Victorian Government is investing up to \$169.6 million in early childhood education by providing free kindergarten to each enrolled child participating in a funded kindergarten program in 2021. All families with a child enrolled in a funded kindergarten program are eligible for Free Kindergarten, this includes all children attending funded kindergarten programs in the year before school (four-year-old kindergarten) and services offering funded three-year-old kindergarten. The initiative also includes reduced fees for children enrolled in a funded kindergarten program in a long day care centre and for children attending unfunded three-year-old programs in sessional kindergarten services.

Regulation 168(2) (n) of the *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011* requires that funded services have a comprehensive written fees policy, and the content of this policy must be communicated to families. Any voluntary parent donations and/or fundraising must comply with the 2021 Free Kindergarten subsidy guidelines and be responsive to the local community.

Legislation and standards

Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006* (Vic)
- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic)
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth)
- *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010*
- *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011*: Regulation 168(2)(n)
- *Equal Opportunity Act 1995* (Vic)
- *National Quality Standard*, including Quality Area 7: Governance and Leadership

4. DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For commonly used terms e.g. Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, Regulatory Authority etc. refer to the *General Definitions* section of this manual.

Approved child care: Approved child care services are services that have Australian Government approval to receive the Child Care Subsidy (refer to Definitions) on behalf of eligible parents. Approved child care includes centre-based day care, including long day care and occasional care, family day care, outside school hours care and in-home care.

Child care subsidy (CCS): A Commonwealth Government means tested subsidy to assist eligible families with the cost of child care. Payments are paid directly to approved child care providers. Further information can be found at: <https://www.education.gov.au/child-care-subsidy-0>

Early start kindergarten: A funding program that enables three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection to attend a kindergarten program that is planned and delivered by an early childhood teacher for up to 15 hours per week. Details are available at: www.education.vic.gov.au. Children that are eligible for Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) will continue to be enrolled, this ensure that service providers receive all funding entitlements and that these children have access to 15 funded hours of kindergarten across Victoria. ESK enrolments contribute to School Readiness Funding (SRF) calculations for service providers. It also allows the Department to continue to monitor efforts to engage the most vulnerable children in kindergarten across Victoria and provide additional targeted support where required through SRF or Early Childhood LOOKOUT.

Enrolment application fee: A payment to cover administrative costs associated with the processing of a child's enrolment application for a place in a program at the service.

Excursion/service event charge: An additional charge required to meet the cost of special events or excursions that occur in response to emerging children's program needs. Events that are planned ahead and are included as an expenditure item in the service's budget do not incur this additional charge (refer to *Excursions and Service Events Policy*).

Fees: A charge for program hours over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 per year) and/or wrap around care.

Free Kindergarten 2021: Kindergarten programs for four-year-old and eligible three-year-old children in Victorian Government funded services will be free in 2021 as part of a \$169.6 million investment in early childhood education in the 2020/21 Victorian State Budget. Free Kinder forms part of the economic recovery support for Victorians as we recover from the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The initiative is for 2021 only.

Health care card: A Commonwealth Government entitlement providing concessions for low-income earners and other eligible people. Details are available at: www.humanservices.gov.au

Kindergarten fee deposit: A charge to secure a place that has been offered in a program at the service, which is not applicable in 2021. Any deposit made prior to the commencement of Term One will be reimbursed to families.

Voluntary parent/guardian payment/donation: A voluntary payment/donation for items not directly related to the provision of the children's program. Explicit and written agreement from a parent is required for any voluntary payments. Attendance at the service is not conditional on this payment.

Wrap around care: care that is provided by a kindergarten service to kindergarten children outside of the 15 hours per week program.

5. SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

Sources

- *Free Kinder 2021 - Information for Service Providers*
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/freekinder2021.aspx>
- *Free Kinder 2021 – Frequently asked questions about Free Kinder 2021*
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/freekinder2021.asp>
- *The Kindergarten Funding Guide (Department of Education and Training):*
www.education.vic.gov.au
- The constitution of [Service Name]

Service policies

- *Complaints and Grievances Policy*
- *Delivery and Collection of Children Policy*
- *Enrolment and Orientation Policy*
- *Excursions and Service Events Policy*
- *Governance and Management of the Service Policy*
- *Inclusion and Equity Policy*
- *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy*

PROCEDURES

The Approved Provider and Person with Management and Control are responsible for:

- implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with parents/guardians, the Nominated Supervisor and staff, and in line with the requirements of DET's Free Kindergarten initiative (refer to Definitions)

- reimbursing families in full for any deposit or fee payments that have already been made for 2021 within a reasonable timeframe (excluding any voluntary payments/donations that the parent has agreed to)
- ensuring families are not charged any compulsory out-of-pocket levies or maintenance fees (voluntary fundraising and payments/donations are permitted)
- ensuring families are only charged for kindergarten programs hours that are over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 hours per year) and/or “wrap around” care.
- ensuring families that attend both sessional kindergarten and a long day care service nominate which service the child will participate in the funded kindergarten program
- ensuring that any surplus funding is used for directly supporting the quality of the teaching and learning in the kindergarten program and/or attendance at the service, including vulnerable children and families not yet enrolled and/or towards the change management required for preparing for three-year-old (in 2022 roll out areas)
- ensuring any voluntary parent payments/donations are explicitly agreed to in writing and receipted
- charging families only for excursions/special events that occur outside the normal program/curriculum
- ensuring that any child that is eligible for Early Start Kindergarten is still enrolled at the service and recorded on the KIM system
- collecting all relevant information regarding those with entitlement to concessions and recording it on the KIM system
- ensuring that the 2021 Free Kindergarten Fee Policy is readily accessible at the service (Regulation 171)
- providing all parents/guardians with information about Free Kindergarten (refer to Attachment 1)
- providing all parents/guardians with a statement of additional hours fees and charges (refer to samples in Attachments 2 and 3) upon enrolment of their child, if applicable
- providing all parents/guardians with an additional payment fee agreement (refer to samples in Attachments 4 and 5), if applicable
- complying with the service's Privacy and Confidentiality Policy regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of additional hours fees
- notifying parents/guardians a minimum of 14 days of any proposed changes to the additional hours fees charged, 2022 kindergarten fees or the way in which the fees are collected (Regulation 172(2)), and ideally providing one term's notice.

The Nominated Supervisor and Person in Day-to-Day Charge is responsible for:

- assisting the Approved Provider in developing this policy, and ensuring that this policy is based on the DET's Free Kindergarten initiative (refer to Definitions)
- implementing and reviewing this policy, in consultation with parents/guardians, the Approved Provider and staff, and in line with the requirements of DET's Free Kindergarten initiative (refer to Sources)
- ensuring families are only charged for kindergarten program hours that are over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 hours per year) and/or "wrap around" care.
- ensuring families that attend both sessional kindergarten and a long day care service nominate which service the child will participate in the funded kindergarten program
- charging families only for excursion/special event that occur outside the normal program/curriculum
- ensuring that any child that is eligible for Early Start Kindergarten is still enrolled at the service and recorded on the KIM system
- collecting all relevant information regarding those with entitlement to concessions and recording it on the KIM system
- ensuring that the Free Kindergarten Fee Policy is readily accessible at the service (Regulation 171)
- providing all parents/guardians with information about free kindergarten (refer to Attachment 1)
- providing all parents/guardians with a statement of additional hours fees and charges (refer to samples in Attachments 2 and 3) upon enrolment of their child, if applicable
- providing all parents/guardians with an additional hours fee payment agreement (refer to samples in Attachments 4 and 5), if applicable
- complying with the service's Privacy and Confidentiality Policy regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of fees
- notifying parents/guardians a minimum of 14 days of any proposed changes to the additional hours fees charged or the way in which the fees are collected (Regulation 172(2)), and ideally providing one term's notice.

Educators and all other staff are responsible for:

- informing the Approved Provider of any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service
- referring parents'/guardians' questions in relation to this policy to the Approved Provider.

Parents/guardians are responsible for:

- reading the [Service Name] 2021 Free Kindergarten information for families (refer to Attachment 1), the Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement

(refer to Attachments 4 and 5) and the Statement of Additional Hours Fees and Charges (refer to Attachments 2 and 3), if applicable

- signing and complying with the Additional Hours Fee Payment Agreement (refer to Attachments 4 and 5) if applicable
- notifying the Approved Provider if experiencing difficulties with the payment of additional hours fees
- providing agreement in writing if any additional payments are made to the [Service Name]

EVALUATION

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the Approved Provider will:

- regularly seek feedback from everyone affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness, particularly in relation to affordability, flexibility of payment options and procedures for the collection of fees
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy
- keep the policy up to date with current legislation and government policy, research, policy and best practice
- revise the policy and procedures as part of the service's policy review cycle, or as required
- notify parents/guardians at least 14 days before making any changes to this policy or its procedures (Regulation 172(2)) unless a lesser period is necessary because of a risk.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: 2021 Free Kindergarten information for families
- Attachment 2: Statement of additional hours and/or wrap around fees
- Attachment 3: Statement of gap fee for unfunded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-olds
- Attachment 4: Additional hours and/or wrap around care fee payment agreement
- Attachment 5: Gap fee for unfunded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-olds payment agreement

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the Approved Provider of [Service Name] on [Date].

REVIEW DATE: [DAY]/[MONTH]/[YEAR]

ATTACHMENT 1

2021 Free Kindergarten information for families

[Service Name] [Year]

[Note: this information must be adapted to suit each individual service's requirements.]

1. General information

Kindergarten programs for four-year-old and eligible three-year-old children in Victorian Government funded services will be free in 2021 as part of a \$169.6 million investment in early childhood education in the 2020/21 Victorian State Budget. Free Kindergarten forms part of the economic recovery support for Victorians as we recover from the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The initiative is for 2021 only.

This investment will save families around \$2,000 for each child enrolled in a participating funded kindergarten program in 2021.

DET also provides funding to assist eligible three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection, to access kindergarten programs.

2. What free kindergarten means at our service

[Service Name] has opted in to the 2021 Free Kindergarten initiative. Applicable parent fees are outlined below: [delete whichever is not applicable]

- Funded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-old children (up to 15 hours per week) – no parent fee
- Funded sessional kindergarten for 4-year-old children (15 hours per week) - no parent fee
- Kindergarten in long day care for 4-year-old children – parent fee will be reduced by a \$2000 offset
- Unfunded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-old children – parent fee will be reduced by a \$1600 offset (which will be prorated for less than five hours)

[Service Name] will reimburse families in full for any deposit or fee payments that have already been made for 2021 within a reasonable timeframe (excluding any voluntary parent donations/payments that you agree to in writing.)

3. Other charges [only applicable to services that provide over and above the free 15 hours per week (600 hours per year); and/or wrap around care; and/or unfunded 3-year-old kindergarten]

Other charges levied by [Service Name] are included on the Statement of Fees and Charges, that will be provided to families upon enrolment.

These include: [delete whichever is not applicable]

- **Excursion/service event charge (outside of the 15 hours per week program):** At times throughout the year an additional excursion(s) or event(s) may be arranged where it is considered relevant to the service's program and the children's interests. At this time any additional costs to families are taken into consideration before a decision is made (refer to *Excursions and Service Events Policy*).
- **Late collection charge:** The Committee of Management/Board [delete whichever is not applicable] reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when parents/guardians are frequently late in collecting a child from the service. This charge will be set at a level determined by the Committee of Management/Board [delete whichever is not applicable].

4. Fundraising and voluntary parent payment/donations

While **participation in fundraising/donation is voluntary**, the support of every family is encouraged. Fundraising activities are also an opportunity for families and communities to come together.

5. Subsidies

5.1 Child Care Subsidy (CCS) [delete if not applicable]

Child Care Subsidy (CCS) is an Australian Government subsidy that can assist eligible families with the costs of childcare at an approved child care provider. [Service Name] is an approved/registered [delete whichever is not applicable] care provider.

Approved childcare are providers that meet certain standards and requirements and are approved by the Australian Government. Approved childcare providers must:

- hold the required approvals or licences to provide child care in the state or territory that the service/s operate in
- ensure the provider and any individual who is or will be a *Person with Management or Control of the Provider* is fit and a proper person to administer the CCS (requirements set out in Section 194E of *A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999*).
- be financially viable and is likely to remain so
- ensure that required fit and proper checks are carried out for each *Person with Management or Control of the Provider, Persons with Responsibility for Day-to-Day Operation of the Service* and *In-Home Care and Family Day Care Educators*

The amount payable is determined by the circumstances of the applicant's including the family income, the hourly rate cap and the hours of activity undertaken by the parents. Further information for parents can be found here: <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/child-care-subsidy>.

Long day care providers that offer funded kindergarten programs are required to directly offset the full \$2,000 payment Free Kindergarten initiative from parents' fees (the total bill), without calculating the cost of the kindergarten hours separately. Fee reductions will be made proportionally across the year to families' bills, i.e. fortnightly or monthly. Only children receiving a funded kindergarten place at [service name], led by a qualified teacher, are eligible under this initiative.

Exclusions and exceptions: Not available for providers that primarily provide an early educational program to children in the year that is two years before grade one of school (preschool or kindergarten).

6. Unfunded three-year-old programs [if applicable]

Families that have children attending unfunded three-year-old programs in sessional kindergarten services will received \$1,660 reduction in parent fees. Compulsory parent fees can be charged above this amount but must not exceed the gap between the payment made by the State and the fee for 2021. Services are required to directly offset the full \$1,600 payment (which will be prorated for less than five hours) from parent fees. Any deposits or payments made totally \$1,600 will be refunded in a reasonable timeframe.

7. Payment of fees [only applicable to services that provide over and above the 15 hours per week (600 hours per year) and/or wrap around care and/or unfunded 3-year-old kindergarten]

The Committee of Management/Board [delete whichever is not applicable] will regularly review payment options and procedures to ensure that they are inclusive and sensitive to families' cultural and financial situations.

Fees will be invoiced to parents/guardians directly and must be paid by the date indicated on the invoice. Each invoice will be accompanied by payment instructions. The first term's fees must be received in full prior to the child commencing at the service. For children enrolled after the

commencement of a term, a pro rata invoice will be issued and must be paid in full within 14 days of the child's commencement at the service. Receipts will be provided for all fee payments.

Parents/guardians experiencing difficulty in paying fees are requested to contact the [responsible position] to arrange a suitable alternative payment plan. The *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* of the service will be complied with at all times in relation to a family's financial/personal circumstances.

8. Unpaid fees [only applicable to services that provide over and above the 15 hours per week (600 hours per year) and/or wrap around care and/or unfunded 3-year-old kindergarten]

If fees are not paid by the due date, the following steps will be taken.

- An initial reminder letter will be sent to parents/guardians with a specified payment date, and will include information on a range of support options available for the family.
- Where payment is still not received, families will be invited to attend a meeting to discuss the range of support options available and establish a payment plan.
- Failure to attend the meeting and continued non-payment may result in a second and final letter notifying parents/guardians that the child's place at the service may be withdrawn unless payment is made or a payment plan is entered into within a specified period of time. This letter will also include information on a range of support options available for the family.
- The Committee of Management/Board [delete whichever is not applicable] will continue to offer support and will reserve the right to employ the services of a debt collector.
- If a decision is made to withdraw the child's place at the service, the parents/guardians will be provided with 14 days' notice in writing.
- No further enrolments of children from the parents/guardians will be accepted until all outstanding fees have been paid.

9. Refund of fees

Any fee payments including an enrolment deposit that would normally be taken off Term 1 fees will be fully refunded to families. Non-refundable enrolment administration fees paid prior to the kindergarten year will be retained.

In any other case, additional hours or unfunded 3 year old gap fees are non-refundable (exceptional circumstances may apply – these are at the discretion of the Committee of Management/Board [delete whichever is not applicable]). There will be no refund of these fees in the following circumstances:

- a child's short-term illness
- public holidays
- family holiday during operational times
- closure of the service for one or more days when a qualified educator is absent and a qualified reliever is not available
- closure of the service for staff training days
- closure of the service due to extreme and unavoidable circumstances.

In addition, there will be no refund where a family chooses not to send their child to the program for the maximum number of hours for which they are enrolled.

10. Children turning three during the year of enrolment for unfunded 3-year-old kindergarten [delete if not applicable]

Full payment of gap fee from the first day of Term 1 is required if a place is to be reserved for a child in the unfunded three-year-old kindergarten program. Children can only commence the program when they have turned three.

11. Support services

Families experiencing financial hardship often require access to family support services. Information on these services may be available from the kindergarten service provider or alternatively families may contact the local council.

12. Notification of fee changes during the year

Fees set for the year would only be reviewed in extraordinary circumstances, for example, if attendance rates fall below the budget 'break even' point. Parents/guardians will be notified one term in advance of any required fee increase and will be offered the option to request a payment plan.

ATTACHMENT 2

[Place on service letterhead]

Statement of additional hours and or wrap around care fees [only applicable to services that provide over and above the 15 hours per week (600 hours per year) and/or wrap around care]

[Service Name]

Fee schedule [Year]

Funded sessional kindergarten for four-year-olds

Hours: "[number of additional hours]" hours per week

and/or

Hours: "[wrap around hours]" hours per week [delete if no applicable]

	Additional Hours	Wrap around care	Total (\$)
Term 1	[item and cost]	[item and cost]	[charge]
Term 2	[item and cost]	[item and cost]	[charge]
Term 3	[item and cost]	[item and cost]	[charge]
Term 4	[item and cost]	[item and cost]	[charge]
Total	[item and cost]	[item and cost]	[charge]

Payment of fees

Invoices will be issued [timeframe] and must be paid by the due date.

Child Care Subsidy (CCS) [delete if not applicable]

For information on the Child Care Subsidy, refer to Fee information for families.

Late collection charge [delete if not applicable]

The Committee of Management/Board [delete whichever is not applicable] reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when parents/guardians are frequently late in collecting a child (refer to Fee information for families).

Statement of gap fee for unfunded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-olds

[Service Name]

Fee schedule [Year]

	Gap fee	Total (\$)
Term 1	[item and cost]	[charge]
Term 2	[item and cost]	[charge]
Term 3	[item and cost]	[charge]
Term 4	[item and cost]	[charge]
Total	[item and cost]	[charge]

Payment of fees

Invoices will be issued [timeframe] and must be paid by the due date.

Child Care Subsidy (CCS) [delete if not applicable]

For information on the Child Care Subsidy, refer to Fee information for families.

Children turning three during the year

Full payment of the gap fee from the first day of Term 1 is required if a place is to be reserved for a child in the three-year-old unfunded kindergarten program. Children can only commence the program when they have turned three.

Late collection charge [delete if not applicable]

The Committee of Management/Board [delete whichever is not applicable] reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when parents/guardians are frequently late in collecting a child (refer to Fee information for families).

ATTACHMENT 4

Additional hours and/or wrap around care fee payment agreement [only applicable to services that provide over and above the 15 hours per week (600 hours per year) and/or wrap around care]

[Year]

Please complete this form and return to [Service Name] by [Date]

Fee payment contract

Child's full name: _____

Parent's/guardian's full name: _____

- I/we acknowledge that the four-year-old 15 hours per week (600 hours per year) funded kindergarten program is fully funded by the state government, with the balance of additional hours over and above and/or wrap around care coming from fees paid by parents/guardians.
- I/we agree to pay any additional fees for services above the 600 hours by the due date on the invoice.
- I/we understand that fees for additional hours each term are non-refundable.
- I/we acknowledge that if fees for additional hours are not paid by the due date, the Committee of Management/Board [delete whichever is not applicable] will implement the late payment of fees procedures, as outlined in the *2021 Free Kindergarten Fee Information for Families*, which could result in the withdrawal of my/our child's place at the service and no further enrolments until the outstanding fees are paid.
- I/we agree that if my/our financial circumstances change and I/we am/are unable to pay as agreed, I/we will immediately notify the [responsible position] to discuss alternative payment options.
- I/we acknowledge that I/we have received and read the service's *2021 Free Kindergarten Fee Information for Families*, which outlines the procedure for payment of fees.

Signature (parent/guardian)

Date

Note: Invoices, receipts and collection of fees will be in accordance with the [Service Name] *2021 Free Kindergarten Fee Policy*.

ATTACHMENT 5

Gap fee for unfunded sessional kindergarten for 3-year-olds payment agreement

[Year]

Please complete this form and return to [Service Name] by **[Date]**

Fee payment contract

Child's full name: _____

Parent's/guardian's full name: _____

- I/we acknowledge that the unfunded kindergarten program for 3-year old's is only partly funded by the state government, with the balance of gap coming from fees paid by parents/guardians.
- I/we agree to pay the gap fee by the due date on the invoice.
- I/we understand that gap fees for each term are non-refundable.
- I/we acknowledge that if the gap fees are not paid by the due date, the Committee of Management/Board **[delete whichever is not applicable]** will implement the late payment of fees procedures, as outlined in the *2021 Free Kindergarten Fee Information for Families*, which could result in the withdrawal of my/our child's place at the service and no further enrolments until the outstanding fees are paid.
- I/we agree that if my/our financial circumstances change and I/we am/are unable to pay as agreed, I/we will immediately notify the **[responsible position]** to discuss alternative payment options.
- I/we acknowledge that I/we have received and read the service's *2021 Free Kindergarten Fee Information for Families*, which outlines the procedure for payment of fees.

Signature (parent/guardian)

Date

Note: Invoices, receipts and collection of fees will be in accordance with the [Service Name] *2021 Free Kindergarten Fee Policy*