

Quality Area 7 – Mandatory



PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- free kindergarten funding for funded sessional kindergarten programs
- reduced fees for children enrolled in a funded kindergarten program in a long day care centre
- the setting, payment and collection of long day-care parent fees minus the Free Kindergarten Funding.



POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

BPA Children’s Services (BPA) is committed to:

- supporting the Victorian Government’s 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.

SCOPE

This policy applies to the approved provider, persons with management or control, nominated supervisor, persons in day-to-day charge, early childhood teachers, educators, staff, parents/guardians attending services managed by BPA.

RESPONSIBILITIES	Approved provider and persons with management or control	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge	Early childhood teacher, educators and all other staff	Parents/guardians	Contractors, volunteers and students
R indicates legislation requirement, and should not be deleted					
Implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with parents/guardians, the Nominated Supervisor and staff, and in line with the requirements of DE’s Free Kindergarten initiative (<i>refer to Definitions</i>)	R	✓	✓	✓	
Ensuring families are not charged any compulsory out-of-pocket levies or maintenance fees (voluntary fundraising and payments/donations are permitted)	R	✓			

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Ensuring any non-funded positions are enrolled in accordance with the Funding Guidelines (<i>refer to Sources</i>)	R	✓			
Ensuring families that attend both sessional kindergarten and a long day care service nominate and document which service the child will participate in the funded kindergarten program	R	✓		✓	
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 expansion	R	✓			
Ensuring any voluntary parent payments/donations are explicitly agreed to in writing and receipted	R	✓			
Charging families only for an occasional special event/ excursions that occur outside the normal program/curriculum	R	✓	✓		
Ensuring that any child that is eligible for Early Start Kindergarten is still enrolled at the service and recorded on the KIM system	R	✓	✓		
Collecting all relevant information regarding those with entitlement to concessions and recording it on the KIM system	R	✓	✓		
Ensuring that the Free Kindergarten Fee Policy is readily accessible at the service (<i>Regulation 171</i>)	R	✓			
Providing all parents/guardians with information about Free Kindergarten (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>)	R	✓			
Reading the BPA Free Kindergarten information for families (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>)				✓	
Referring parents’/guardians’ questions in relation to this policy to the approved provider.		✓	✓		

BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION



BACKGROUND

The Best Start, Best Life reform will help all Victorian children dream even bigger through increased access to quality early childhood education and care. A critical part of the reform is Free Kindergarten, which will support access to two years of high-quality kindergarten programs for all Victorian children. All families with a child enrolled in a funded kindergarten program are eligible for Free Kindergarten, this includes both 3 and 4-year-old kindergarten programs.

Free Kindergarten supports families to access a funded kindergarten program by:

- providing a free 15-hour program to four-year-old children enrolled at a sessional service
- providing a free 5-to-15-hour program to three-year-old children enrolled at a sessional service (subject to the length of funded program offered)

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- offsetting the funded kindergarten program component of parent fees for three and four-year-old children enrolled at a long day care service

Free kindergarten supports every Victorian child to get the best start in life no matter where they live. Research shows that play-based learning is a powerful way to support children's learning and development. Two years of early learning is a crucial part of their educational journey, these benefits last into the school years and beyond.

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 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*

The most current amendments to listed legislation can be found at:

- Victorian Legislation – Victorian Law Today: www.legislation.vic.gov.au
- Commonwealth Legislation – Federal Register of Legislation: www.legislation.gov.au



DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For regularly used terms e.g. Approved provider, Nominated supervisor, Notifiable complaints, Serious incidents, Duty of care, etc. refer to the Definitions file of the PolicyWorks catalogue.

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: www.education.gov.au/child-care-subsidy

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

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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.

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*)

Free Kindergarten: A Victorian Government initiative providing free kindergarten programs for four-year-old and three-year-old children in funded services

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.

SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES



SOURCES

- Best Start Best Life: <https://www.vic.gov.au/give-your-child-the-best-start-in-life>
- The Kindergarten Funding Guide (Department of Education and Training): www.education.vic.gov.au
- Resources for Funded Kindergartens: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au>
- The constitution of [Service Name]

RELATED POLICIES

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



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

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- revise the policy and procedures as part of the service's policy review cycle, or as required
- notifying all stakeholders affected by this policy at least 14 days before making any significant changes to this policy or its procedures, unless a lesser period is necessary due to risk ([Regulation 172 \(2\)](#)).



ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: Free Kindergarten information for families



AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the approved provider of BPA on 27 September 2023.

REVIEW DATE: 27 September 2026.

ATTACHMENT 1. FREE KINDERGARTEN INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

BPA [Year]

1. General information

Kindergarten programs for four-year-old and eligible three-year-old children in Victorian Government funded services will be free as part of the Best Start, Best Life reform.

This investment will save families up to \$2,500 for each child enrolled in a participating funded kindergarten program.

The Department of Education (DE) 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

BPA Children's Services has opted in to the Free Kindergarten initiative. Applicable parent fees are outlined below

- 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 3 and 4 -year-old children – parent fee will be reduced by the Free Kindergarten Funding

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. Late Collection Charge

BPA 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 BPA. *Refer to Late Pick-up Procedure.*

6. Early Start Kindergarten

Early Start Kindergarten gives eligible children 15 hours of free kindergarten a week for two years before starting school.

To be eligible the child must be three by 30 April in the year they start kindergarten and meet one of the following criteria:

- be from a refugee or asylum seeker background
- identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- family has had contact with Child Protection

Children can also access free four-year-old kindergarten through Early Start Kindergarten Extension Grant. Contact BPA for further information.

7. Children turning three during the year of enrolment

To be eligible for three-year-old kindergarten, the child must be three by 30 April in the year they start kindergarten. Children who turn three between the commencement of the kindergarten year and the 30 April cannot commence kindergarten until after their third birthday.

LATE PICK UP PROCEDURE

PURPOSE

To provide clear guidelines for parents/guardians or carers, BPA Children's Services staff in relation to their responsibilities relating to the delivery and collection of children at the service.

Procedure in relation to the late collection of a child

In a situation where the parent/guardian or carer is 10 minutes late in collecting their child and has not notified the service that they will be late, the staff will:

- Contact the parents/guardians or carer of the child and if they are not available, the other persons authorised to collect the child, requesting that they collect the child.
- If the parents/guardians or carer or authorised persons cannot be contacted, or they are unable to collect the child, or the child will not be collected within the staff's rostered hours, the staff will contact the Approved Provider.
- Continue to attempt to contact the parents/guardians or carers or authorised persons.

In situations where a parent/guardian or carer has not collected their child from the service by the end of the staff's rostered hours, the staff will remain on the premises with the child until relieved by an Approved Provider representative. Two adults will remain on the premises with the child at all times.

In a situation where the parent/guardian or carer or authorised persons cannot be contacted by the end of the staff's rostered hours:

- The Approved Provider representative and/or staff caring for the child will continue to attempt to contact the parents/guardians or carers or authorised persons;
- The Approved Provider representative, or the local police may be requested to visit the parents/guardians or carers address to ascertain if there is a problem/illness;
- The Approved Provider representative or staff will notify the Children's Services Regulatory Authority (Department of Education and Training – Western Region) of the current situation and procedure undertaken. If DET cannot be contacted, they will document the date, time and reason for the call and contact DET as soon as possible.
- After a period of time determined by the Approved Provider representative in consultation with staff, the Approved Provider representative or staff member will contact the Department of Human Services (DHS) Child Protection Services stating the service is unable to contact parent/guardian or carer or emergency contacts for the child/children.
- The Approved Provider representatives or staff will follow the advice given to them by DHS Child Protection Services.

2. Late Collection Fee

It is the responsibility of parents/guardians to collect their child at the conclusion of the session. BPA recognises that there may be isolated occasions when a parent/guardian may be delayed through no fault of their own. BPA also has a responsibility for staff who have other tasks or commitments after the conclusion of the sessions and who must be paid if they remain after their rostered finishing time. A late collection fee may be applied when the parent/guardian is frequently more than 10 minutes late in collecting their child. The fee will be:

- \$20 for the first 15 minutes or part thereof
- Then \$10 for every 5 minutes thereafter

A late pick up invoice will be issued to the family and must be paid by the due date.

PARENT/GUARDIAN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Centre Name: _____

Child's full name: _____

Parent's/guardian's full name: _____

Parent/Guardian Acknowledgement

- o I acknowledge that the 3 and 4-year-old kindergarten programs are fully funded by the state government, and we can only access funding at one nominated kindergarten service.
- o I understand that BPA may be eligible to access additional funding if I/we meet one of the following criteria, and agree to provide this information:

Please tick the relevant box:

- Commonwealth Health Care Card
- Pensioner Concession Card
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- Veteran's Affairs Gold Card
- Refugee or Asylum Seeker visa (200-204, 786 or 866)
- Bridging visas for any of the above Refugee or Asylum Seeker visas
- Multiple Birth (triplets or above)

Except in the case of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child, supporting documentation will need to be sighted.

If my/our eligibility lapses, then I acknowledge I am required to notify BPA as soon as possible.

- o I understand that the child is eligible for Early Start Kindergarten if I/we meet one of the criteria (as per below) – 3YO ONLY- tick which is applicable below.
- o I acknowledge that I am required to pay a late pickup fee if the child is not collected from kindergarten in an acceptable timeframe.
- o I acknowledge that to maintain the child's kindergarten place the child must attend kindergarten on a regular basis.
- o I acknowledge that I have received and read the service's Fee Information for Families, which outlines the procedures for payment of fees.

Early Start Kindergarten – 3YO ONLY

Early Start Kindergarten gives eligible children 15 hours of free or low-cost kindergarten a week for two years before starting school. To be eligible, the child must be three by 30 April in the year they start kindergarten and meet one of the following criteria:

- o *be from a refugee or asylum seeker background*
- o *identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander*
- o *your family has had contact with Child Protection.*

Please advise if the child is:

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	Please tick:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Known to child protection	Please tick:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
A refugee or asylum seeker background	Please tick:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____