



Supporting families experiencing vulnerabilities

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Purpose of this guide | 3 |
| Introduction | 4 |
| Identifying a child or family experiencing vulnerability | 6 |
| Supporting the needs of the child & family | 9 |
| Department resources to support access & inclusion | 13 |
| Funding to support access & inclusion | 14 |
| Training & resources for educators | 18 |
| Support services for families | 20 |
| Fee support for families | 22 |

Purpose of this guide

The purpose of this guide is to give service providers the information to support the enrolment of families experiencing vulnerable circumstances into their service and then to provide ongoing support for both the child and the family.

This booklet has been designed with the Department of Education to be used in conjunction with the following additional ACA Victoria publications:

- ***Kindergarten funding: Early Start Kindergarten***
- ***Models: Delivering a Three-Year-old program in a long day care setting***
- ***Models: Delivering a Four-Year-old program in a long day care setting***

These publications are available on our website at:

<https://vic.childcarealliance.org.au/services/kinder-funding-support>.

For up-to-date information, refer to the Department's page on [kindergarten funding requirements](#).

For questions and ongoing support about funding requirements, call ACAV on (03) 9532 2017.

Introduction

The Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) framework in Australia is underpinned by the objective that all children have access to high quality early childhood education that meets their individual needs.

All families who use early learning services bring with them a wide range of experiences, values, beliefs and needs. Some families will require extra support, either temporarily or on an ongoing basis. In particular, families who are experiencing vulnerable circumstances may require additional support, whether directly on site or via support programs.

It is the responsibility of service providers and educators to ensure that the supports and programs they provide meet the needs of all families.

What are vulnerable circumstances?

In the context of early learning settings, a child may be considered to be experiencing vulnerable circumstances if they or the family is experiencing multiple challenges which limit the capacity of the parents and other family members to effectively care, protect, and provide for their child, putting at risk their immediate wellbeing and long-term development.

There are many situations which can contribute to families and children experiencing vulnerable circumstances. These situations may be short-term, depending on the ability of the individual family to deal with and recover from these stresses, or they may be ongoing and more permanent.

Factors which can contribute to vulnerability include:

- Divorce/separation
- Poverty
- Substance abuse
- Illness (physical and mental)
- Homelessness
- Family violence
- Migration and visa status e. g. Asylum seekers or refugees

A child in an early childhood service may be considered to be living under vulnerable circumstances if they:

- are living in out-of-home care
- have a disability or have special needs
- are deemed vulnerable by a government agency, funded family or family violence service
- are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- are living in a remote region.

Families from disadvantaged or vulnerable backgrounds tend to have more complex support needs and this varies according to their unique circumstances.

The importance of accommodating families experiencing vulnerabilities

The benefits of high-quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) are well recognised and acknowledged locally and globally across the education sector ¹ demonstrating the significant advantages children gain from attending quality early learning services.

Children who enjoy quality early learning are likely to be well socialised, confident, inquisitive about the world, accepting of diversity, resilient to manage challenges and to be life-long learners.

These benefits flow on to the families, the wider community and the Australian economy. For families from disadvantaged or vulnerable backgrounds, these benefits are **even more clear**.

Children who participate in high quality early childhood education are more likely to complete year 12 and are less likely to repeat grades or require additional support. High quality early childhood education also has broader impacts; it is linked with higher levels of employment, income and financial security, improved health outcomes and reduced crime. It helps build the skills children will need for the jobs of the future.²

There are a range of supports available for families in vulnerable circumstances and this information covers a wide range of options to ensure the needs of the family can be met.

All supports referred to in this guide can be applied to families with children in funded kindergarten programs, and some supports can also be applied to families with younger children in early learning services.

Identifying a child or family experiencing vulnerability

There are generally three ways that you may find out that a family is experiencing vulnerability.

1/ A support service may contact you, to enrol a child who is considered vulnerable.

These organisations may include:

- Child Protection
- Regional DET office (LOOKOUT, ECIB, KESO)
- Red Cross, Brotherhood of St Laurence
- Maternal and Child Health Nurse
- Child First (transitioning to Orange Door)
- Family Services and Family Violence agencies

2/ Alternatively, families may disclose information to you when enquiring about care or during the enrolment process, including answers on the enrolment form.

3/ Educators may observe changes in the children's behaviour or the family dynamic over time and need to put supports in place (see page 9 for more information).

When enrolling a child, it is essential to create a positive, welcoming environment that is based on respect and builds trust. Families who have been referred to your service under these circumstances would greatly benefit from having **one key contact**, to ensure that they are receiving consistent messaging and can start to build a trusted relationship with one person.

It is important to be sensitive to the family's needs at this time and investigate supports that the child might need (see below for more information). This can be done in a way that suits each family – through informal conversations and via the enrolment form.

For example, ensuring that your environment is culturally safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is important for families to feel welcome right from their first experience with your service.

The enrolment process

You may need to consider aspects of your enrolment processes:

- Be aware that to some families an enrolment form can be difficult to navigate, so you may need to spend 1-1 time going through it with them. Some families may also need an interpreter.
- Any enrolment or waiting list fees may need to be waived to ensure that the children can attend your service (also note that for kindergarten enrolments, it is expected that these fees are waived for families listed in the priority of access guidelines (see page 8)).
- A child referred by Child Protection may not start with their CRN (required to access CCS), but this should not delay their start. Refer to this [link](#) for more information about what you can do in this situation.
- At times, you may have a family that does not have a birth certificate for their child. This is not a requirement to enrol a child into your service and should not delay their enrolment and attendance.
- Ensuring flexibility with the orientation process, allowing families extra time to settle their children in. As mentioned above, having a key contact for both the child and family in the child's room may be beneficial.



Priority of Access to a kindergarten program

There is priority of access criteria that needs to be met when enrolling families into funded kindergarten programs at your service. You will also have your own enrolment processes to consider, but the families in the categories below will take priority.

As per the Department's requirements, you must also ensure that any waiting list or enrolment deposits are waived and do not provide a barrier for families to access the kindergarten program.

| HIGH PRIORITY CHILDREN |
|--|
| Children at risk of abuse or neglect, including children who: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- are in Out of Home Care- are eligible for Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) or Access to Early Learning (AEL) |
| Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children |
| Asylum seeker and refugee children |
| Children eligible for Kindergarten Fee Subsidy*, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- a parent or child who holds a Health Care Card- multiple birth children (triplets or more) |
| Children with additional needs, defined as children who: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- require additional assistance to fully participate in the kindergarten program- require a combination of services which are individually planned- have a specific disability or developmental delay |

*If your service does not offer Kindergarten Fee Subsidy, you still need to include families that may qualify for KFS in your enrolment priority.

Supporting the needs of the child & family

Effective programs for vulnerable children and their families are those which are developed and designed to meet the individual needs of the child and the family. Determining these needs can only be achieved once a strong, supportive and respectful relationship has been developed with the family.

The long day care environment can be a positive space as children and families can develop enriching relationships over a long period of time. As long day care centres can accommodate very young babies, children may spend a good proportion of their early years at one consistent place. This could include the two years before school as funded 3- and 4-year-old kindergarten. It would make for an easy transition for both the children and parents to transition through from the baby's room through to the 4-year-old kindergarten, strengthening relationships with educators and building their developing skills.

A kindergarten program in a long day care centre provides a supportive environment in which qualified Early Childhood Teachers (ECTs) and educators work to engage 3 and 4-year-old children in a program promoting communication, learning, and thinking, positive relationships, identity, and wellbeing. Early childhood teachers and educators use the [Early Years Learning Framework](#) (EYLF) and [Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework](#) (VEYLDF) to plan an educational program based on the needs of the children and is run for at least 15 hours per week (for 40 weeks) for 4 year old children and 5-15 hours per week (for 40 weeks) for 3-year-old children.

Educators play an important role in ensuring the environment fosters and nurtures the development of vulnerable children by focusing on the following areas:

- Providing a supportive, welcoming environment that reflects diversity.
- Ensuring there is a sense of predictability and consistency about the day and the expectations of the children.
- Providing opportunities for children to be able to take risks and experiment with the environment.
- Actively forming strong, trusting relationships with the children.
- Providing consistent clear limits for children which are communicated in a sensitive manner.
- Supporting the development of the child's sense of self.
- Empowering children to be able to communicate their wants and needs and giving them a sense of agency.
- Role modelling positive interactions.

- Ensuring that the experiences, routines and transitions are developmentally appropriate and both interest-based and strength-based.
- Ensuring that children are supported in their transitions from room to room and from the service to school.
- Basing the program and outcomes on the relevant aspects of the Belonging, Being and Becoming Early years Learning Framework (EYLF) and Victorian Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF).

Educators play an important role in ensuring that families are supported by:

- Providing an environment that welcomes families and encourages participation on any level.
- Communicating information about the child's development in a variety of ways. This could include translating material or engaging an interpreter to communicate with families.
- Finding out as much information about the child from the families as they can.
- Actively assisting families to access any external supports they may need (see information below).
- Creating culturally safe environments for culturally diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.
- Keeping up to date with training in trauma informed practice information.
- Working as a team and ensuring ongoing communication regarding the children in their care.

Welfare of children

All concerns about the wellbeing of a child should be taken seriously and acted upon. This includes concerns about the wellbeing of a child, which does not appear to be the result of abuse. All educators need to be aware of the criteria for reporting concerns for the welfare of a child in their care.

Child wellbeing

Reporting wellbeing concerns to Child FIRST (transitioning to Orange Door)

If an educator is concerned about a child, they may need to make a referral to Child FIRST (Family Information, Referral and Support Team), a community-based referral point into Family Services.

A referral should be made if:

- There are significant concerns for a child's wellbeing and the concerns have a low-to-moderate impact on the child
- The child's immediate safety is not compromised
- The referral has been discussed with the family and they are supportive of it.

Examples of concerns that should report be reported include instances when a child's care or development is significantly impacted on by:

- parents who lack the skills to support their child's physical, emotional and cognitive development
- family conflict or family breakdown
- pressure due to a family member's physical / mental illness, substance abuse, or disability
- significant social or economic disadvantage.

Reporting wellbeing concerns to Victoria Police

You must contact Victoria Police on 000 if the:

- child's immediate safety is compromised.

Reporting wellbeing concerns to DFFH Child Protection

DFFH Child Protection should be contacted if there are significant protective concerns for the wellbeing of a child, but the parents are unable or unwilling to address or resolve these concerns.

This includes all concerns that:

- have a serious impact on a child's safety, stability or development
- are persistent and entrenched and likely to have a serious impact on a child's safety, stability or development
- relate to a parent who cannot or will not protect the child from significant harm
- include a belief that the family is likely to be uncooperative in seeking assistance.

Please note: In any of the situations above, you are bound by mandatory reporting obligations.

Mandatory reporting

Educators within an early childhood service play a vital role in protecting children from abuse by responding to and reporting any incidents, disclosures or suspicions. They are often best placed to identify signs and behaviours that may indicate that a child has been subject to abuse, or that a community member, staff member, contractor or volunteer may be a perpetrator of abuse. All educators have a duty of care to take reasonable steps to protect children in their care from harm.

[Click here](#) for further information.

Child Information Sharing Scheme, Family Violence Sharing Scheme and Multi-Agency Risk assessment and Management Framework

The Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS), Family Violence Sharing Scheme (FVISS) and the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM) enable organisations such as education and care services to share confidential information about any person to promote the wellbeing and/or safety of a child or group of children, including the sharing of relevant information to assess or manage risk of family violence. Consent is not required from any person when sharing under CISS or FVISS.

Together, these reforms (CISS, FVISS and MARAM) further enable centre-based education and care services; schools; system and statutory bodies; and education health, wellbeing and inclusion workforces, to work together with other services in improving children's wellbeing and safety. For example, an educator can now ask for a child's Maternal and Child Health Nurse to share information about the child and family, if they are concerned about a child's wellbeing and the concerns meet the criteria.

[Click here](#) for more information.



Department resources to support access & inclusion

The following supports are available for all long day care services:

Koorie Engagement Support Officers

[KESOs](#) support the Department's early years priorities and its education strategy for Koorie children and students including *Marrung – Aboriginal Plan 2016-2026* and the Department's Aboriginal Inclusion Plan. KESOs can be linked in at any stage of a Koorie person's educational journey.

In the early childhood area, KESOs work with child and family service providers (e.g., early childhood centres) and the other key stakeholders, as well as local Koorie communities, to improve the early years participation of Koorie children. Their work includes advice on the establishment of positive, culturally inclusive learning environments.

LOOKOUT Early Childhood Advisers

LOOKOUT Early Childhood Learning Advisors (ECLAs) work across region-based [LOOKOUT](#) Centres to facilitate children's participation in early learning services and play a key role in the implementation of [The Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out of Home Care](#). They provide support to educators, carers and agencies to ensure vulnerable children can access high quality early learning services. Add link.

The following resource are available for long day care services providing a funded kindergarten program:

Early Childhood Improvement Branch

Service providers can access support and guidance for the funded kindergarten from the Early Childhood Improvement Branch (ECIB) based in their region which can be contacted via email [here](#). Each ECIB consists of Early Childhood Performance and Planning Advisers (ECPAPA), Kindergarten Improvement Advisers (KIA) and Early Childhood Funding Advisers (ECFA) to assist with all aspects of providing a funded kindergarten program.

Funding to support access & inclusion

The following funding is available in all long day care services:

Commonwealth Inclusion Support program

The Commonwealth Inclusion Support Program (ISP) provides funding through the Inclusion Development fund to enable long day care service programs to build their capacity and capability to include children with additional needs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds and children who are refugees. The aim is for all children have genuine opportunities to access, participate and achieve positive learning outcomes as per the Approved Learning Frameworks (EYLF, Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework).

The ISP consists of three key elements:

1. **Inclusion Agencies** in each state and territory – an Inclusion Agency is contracted to assist eligible services build their capacity and capability to provide and embed inclusive practice in their delivery of education and care programs.
2. **Inclusion Development Fund (IDF)** – the IDF provides funding to assist eligible services to address a barrier to inclusion that cannot be addressed by the support provided by an Inclusion Agency.
3. **Inclusion Development Fund Manager** – a single national Inclusion Development Fund Manager is contracted to provide nationally consistent and equitable management of the IDF through assessing applications for funding and communicating outcomes to services.

[Click here](#) for more information.

The following funding is available for long day care services providing a funded kindergarten program:

Early Start Kindergarten

[Early Start Kindergarten](#) (ESK) provides eligible children with 15 hours of free or low-cost kindergarten each week led by an Early Childhood Teacher within a kindergarten program. This enables these children to access 2 years of funded kindergarten before school.

ESK is available to children who are at least **three years old** by 30 April in the year they are enrolled to attend the program and:

- Are from a refugee or asylum seeker background (if the child holds or has a parent or guardian who holds a protection or humanitarian visa, ImmiCard, or exemption from the Department of Education, or
- Are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent or
- Have had contact with Child Protection (a family or child who has a current, or a history of, involvement with Child Protection. This includes children in out-of-home care, or a child or family who has been referred by Child Protection to another support service, or any child where an unsubstantiated notification has been made to Child Protection.)

During the three-year-old kindergarten rollout there will no change to ESK accessibility, and services should continue to enrol eligible children in 15 hours per week of kindergarten through ESK. This guarantees that ESK eligible children continue to access the full 15 hours irrespective of the number of hours of funded three-year-old kindergarten offered. It also ensures that service providers can continue to receive all funding entitlements in relation to SRF calculations.

Early Start Kindergarten Extension Grant

The ESK Extension Grant provides a free or low-cost year-before-school kindergarten program for children who turn **four years old** before the 30 April of the year they attend the kindergarten program and:

- Attend an integrated long day care kindergarten program and
- Are from a refugee or asylum seeker background, or of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, or have had contact with child protection (see above).

A child is not required to access ESK in the previous year to access the ESK extension grant.

A child may be eligible for ESK as well as CCS and ACCS and these can be used together. The grants will not impact CCS or ACCS payments.

For detailed information, refer to the ACAV publication: Kindergarten funding: Early Start Kindergarten.

Access to Early Learning

[Access to Early Learning](#) (AEL) provides an intensive early intervention program supporting vulnerable three-year-old children from families with multiple and complex needs, assisting them to access high quality kindergarten programs. AEL is for families that have a range of barriers to kindergarten participation.

AEL provides an experienced and degree-qualified facilitator to work with families, educators and services to ensure vulnerable children participate in early learning.

Similar to ESK, the AEL grant provides children participating in the program with access to 15 hours of free kindergarten per week, including in areas with funded three-year-old kindergarten.

AEL grants are paid at the same rate as an ESK grant, and are paid annually, directly to the service. To apply for the grant, service providers are required to enter the child details in KIM. The AEL grant can also be used in combination with CCS and ACCS.

This program is currently available for a limited number of families through specific agencies and councils in 25 local government area across the State. Families will be referred to an AEL provider by either a Maternal and Child Health, Family Services, Child FIRST or Child Protection and you will be contacted by the AEL provider if a place is required.

Kindergarten Inclusion Support (KIS) program

The [KIS program](#) contributes to the provision of a funded kindergarten program. The program enhances a service's capacity to provide a program that is responsive to the individual abilities, interests and needs of children with a disability or developmental delay with ongoing high support needs or children with complex medical needs in an inclusive environment.

The KIS program may provide:

- specialist consultancy for educators to support adjustments, adaptations, and modifications of the kindergarten program
- specialist training for educators to meet the individual needs of the child with a disability and ongoing high support needs and/or complex medical needs
- minor building modifications (such as ramps and grip rails) supporting the child's attendance in the kindergarten program and participation in the activities
- staffing support such as an additional assistant who works as a member of the team delivering the kindergarten program.

The KIS program can be accessed in conjunction with the [Commonwealth Inclusion Support Program \(ISP\)](#) (see page 17) as part of the Commonwealth Inclusion Development Fund (IDF) Additional Educator Funding where there may be a gap in a requirement for educator support. IDF funding could be for up to 25 hours.

KIS and IDF supports can be accessed by applying for the KIS program for a child in your funded kindergarten program and then once the KIS program application outcome is known, you can then contact the [Victorian Inclusion Agency](#) working with the child's Inclusion Professional (IP), to explore the possibility of accessing the Inclusion Development Fund (IDF) Additional Educator Funding as part of the ISP. For example, if the KIS application results in support that does not cover the 15 hours of the kindergarten program, this could lead to a combination approach using both funding options to ensure support is provided.

School Readiness Funding

[School Readiness Funding](#) (SRF) amounts are based on the educational disadvantage levels in a service, which is informed by Student Family Occupation and Education (SFOE) data. Service providers are required to collect this data from parents and/or guardians of each eligible funded child at enrolment time. Service providers are required to enter this information into KIM against each child's record as part of the Annual Confirmation process around April each year. SRF is service-level funding, not a package for individual children. The funding allocation for each service will vary depending on the cohort and number of children attending the service that year.

This funding is calculated by the Department, paid to your service annually in two 50% instalments and can be used to purchase a range of programs and supports. Part of the requirements of SRF is completing a Mid-Year-Review and an End-Of-Year acquittal.

For further information about these grants and subsidies, refer to the ACAV Guide, Kindergarten Funding: What Happens Next?



Training & resources for educators

Australian Childhood Foundation

The Australian Childhood Foundation (ACF) is an organisation that provides information to support children, families and professionals in the area of childhood trauma. There are a variety of resources, and [training opportunities](#) available.

Be You

Be You supports educators from early learning services and to develop a positive, inclusive and resilient learning community where every child, young person, educator and family can achieve their best possible mental health. There are many [resources](#) and training opportunities available.

Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) and Family Violence Sharing Scheme (FVISS)

CISS and FVISS allows professionals working with children to gain a complete view of the children they work with, making it easier to identify wellbeing or safety needs earlier, and to act on them sooner. A range of resources are available to ensure that Victorian education and care workforces have the knowledge and information needed to work consistently and collaboratively to identify and respond to child wellbeing and safety needs. For information on training, resources and guidance, visit the [Information Sharing and MARAM website](#).

Early ABLES

[Early ABLES](#) is a strengths and observation-based online assessment tool. It supports educators to provide individualised learning experiences for children aged two to five years who have a disability and/or developmental delay. There are eight Early ABLES assessments that align with the five outcomes of the [Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework](#) and there is free [Early Ables Online Training](#) available for educators.

For more information contact earlyables@education.vic.gov.au

FKA Children's Services

FKA Children's Services (fkaCS) advocates for children's cultural and linguistic rights and provides support and [resources](#) to education and care services in the provision of culturally rich environments.

Noah's Ark

Noah's Ark is a not-for-profit community organisation that offers a range of [services](#) and programs that support families who have a child (aged 0-12) with a disability or additional needs

SNAICC

SNAICC is the national voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. There are [resources](#) available to support the program to be culturally safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Victorian Aboriginal Education Association

VAEAI is the peak Koorie community organisation for education in Victoria. It provides advice and [resources](#) for professionals, including those working in the early years sector.

Victorian Inclusion Agency

The Victorian Inclusion Agency (VIAC) is an organisation that supports the inclusion of all children in education and care. There are [resources](#) available for early childhood professional to support children with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and refugee children.

VIT Language

Free telephone, video and on-site interpreter through Language Loop are available for eligible services. For eligibility requirements and more information, click [here](#).

Support services for families

Educators must develop knowledge of the support services available in the local community and to provide information openly. The following is a range of support services available:

Best Start

Best Start is an initiative to support families and caregivers to provide the best possible environment, experiences and care for children from birth to age eight. The program focuses on children experiencing vulnerability and all Aboriginal children aiming to boost children's participation in programs such as kindergarten and maternal and child health (MCH) services. The program also puts in strategies, such as providing referral pathways when targeted supports are required. Best Start is site-specific and there are currently 30 sites in Victoria.

Brotherhood of St Laurence

Brotherhood Of St Laurence is a social justice organisation that has many support services available for children and families experiencing vulnerabilities. These include:

- Playgroups
- Early learning programs, e.g., HIPPY
- Refugee and migrant programs

For more information, click [here](#).

Early Parenting Services

Early Parenting Centre services are provided by:

- [O'Connell Family Centre](#) located in Canterbury. Ph: [\(03\) 8416 7600](#)
- [Queen Elizabeth Centre](#) located in Noble Park. Ph: [\(03\) 9549 2777](#)
- [Tweddle Child and Family Health Service](#) located in Footscray. Ph: [\(03\) 9689 1577](#)

These services provide programs that strengthen parenting capacity and skills, enhance parent-child relationships and link families with other community supports. Support is provided in a variety of ways, including residential and day-stay parenting programs as well as in-home support.

Foundation House

Foundation House supports early childhood services to work with families from refugee backgrounds through the provision of resources, professional learning and consultancy, as well as place-based collaborative projects, to promote the full inclusion of families from refugee backgrounds in early childhood services. For information about resources, click [here](#).

Maternal and Child Health Services

The Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Service works in partnership with families to care for babies and young children until they start school. Families visit MCH nurses at 10 key stages of a child's development. The visits focus on optimising child and family health, wellbeing, safety, learning and development. The MCH nurse offers additional visits, first time parenting groups, and links to local community activities and services when extra support is needed. For further support, families can call the Maternal and Child Health Line on **13 22 29** (24 hours a day, 7 days a week).

Noah's Ark

[Noah's Ark](#) is a not-for-profit community organisation that offers a range of services and programs that support families who have a child (aged 0-12) with a disability or additional needs. They work closely with children with a disability, their families and the services they participate in.

The Orange door (transitioning from Child FIRST)

The [Orange Door](#) is a free service who are experiencing or have experienced family violence and families who need extra support with the care of children.

Families can access a range of family violence and family services through The Orange Door – in person or over the phone.

To make it easier for people to be safer and supported, The Orange Door brings together workers from:

- specialist family violence services
- family services
- Aboriginal services
- services for men who use violence

Click [here](#) for a list of service locations and contact numbers.

Pre-School Field Officers

If an early childhood teacher (ECT) or a parent in a funded kindergarten program has a concern about a child's development, they can contact the [Pre-School Field Officer](#) (PSFO) in their local area. The concerns may be associated with any area of a children's development, including language delay or challenging behaviours. The role of the PSFO is to support the access and participation of children attending or about to start a funded kindergarten program. Children accessing Early Start Kindergarten may also qualify for PSFO support.

Raising children network

The [Raising Children Network](#) provides up-to-date information for parents in the form of articles, videos and interactive resources.

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) is a state-wide Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) supporting children and families. The family support program provides at home support for families, strengthening parenting capacity and connecting families to community services.



Fee support for families

The following is available for all long day care services:

Child Care Subsidy

Child Care Subsidy is assistance to help with the cost of childcare. It is paid directly to services and is through the federal Department of Education, Skills and Employment. To be eligible, families must use an approved childcare service, be responsible for paying the fees and meet residency and immunisation requirements. For more information, refer to [Child Care Subsidy](#) information.

Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS)

Families may be eligible for Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS). In most cases there are no out-of-pocket gap fees for the families to pay. There are 4 categories of ACCS:

- an eligible grandparent getting an income support payment
- transitioning from certain income support payments to work
- experiencing temporary financial hardship
- caring for a child who is vulnerable or at risk of harm, abuse or neglect (child wellbeing)

ACCS (temporary financial hardship)

Families experiencing temporary financial hardship may be eligible for ACCS if they are also eligible for CCS, have experienced temporary financial hardship due to an event that happened in the last 6 months, and have a reduced ability to pay childcare fees.

Temporary financial hardship may occur if a parent:

- lost their job
- suffered a loss of income or a business failure due to circumstances out of their control, such as serious illness
- been adversely affected by a major disaster event
- had their home destroyed or severely damaged.

A parent may also be experiencing temporary financial hardship from:

- the death of a partner or child
- loss of child support due to the death of a paying parent

- having to leave home and not being able to return because of an extreme circumstance such as from being affected by family and domestic violence
- being affected by family and domestic violence, and the family member responsible leaves, or is removed from the home.

The **parent** must apply for this type of ACCS through Centrelink and will need to provide evidence, such as bank statements, Employment Separation Certificate, statutory declaration, death certificate or insurance letter. It can be distressing for parents to go through this process and provide this information, so they will need your support and compassion during this time.

For more information, refer to [The Temporary Financial Hardship Subsidy](#).

ACCS (child wellbeing)

Families of children at risk of serious abuse or neglect may be eligible for ACCS (child wellbeing). This gives a child's family a higher rate of subsidy, and more hours of subsidised childcare.

Families must meet criteria for ACCS (child wellbeing). The parent or carer must be eligible for [Child Care Subsidy \(CCS\)](#), and care for a child who is considered at risk of abuse or neglect.

Service providers are responsible for applying for ACCS (child wellbeing) on behalf of a family. This [guide](#) outlines the evidence required when applying for ACCS (child wellbeing).

For the purposes of ACCS (child wellbeing), a child is at risk of serious abuse or neglect if they are exposed to:

- serious physical, emotional or psychological abuse
- sexual abuse
- domestic or family violence, or
- neglect.

A child is also considered at risk if they:

- are likely to experience any of the above in the future, or
- are in a foster care arrangement recognised in a decision of a court or tribunal under relevant state/territory law (including kinship care).

Any child who is identified as being at risk under child protection law will meet the definition of at risk and will be therefore eligible to receive the payment. For more information, refer to this [this page](#). If eligible, the family will receive subsidy for up to 6 weeks. After this initial 6 weeks, if you think the family need to keep getting this additional subsidy you can apply for longer periods of up to 13 weeks. You can apply for up to 52 weeks if any of the following apply to the child:

- loss of child support due to the death of a paying parent
- they are on a long-term protection order
- they are in formal foster care
- they are in a formal kinship care arrangement.

There may occasions where children referred by Child Protection may not have their CRN, but that should not stop their eligibility or enrolment.

In rare cases, you might not be able to identify a CCS-eligible parent or carer. In these cases, you may be eligible to receive ACCS (child wellbeing) payments on behalf of the child. To do this, you must enrol the child under a [Provider Eligible Enrolment](#).

The following is available for long day care services providing a funded kindergarten program:

Free Kinder

Free Kinder will be introduced from 2023 by the Department of Education as part of the Best Start, Best Life reforms. The funding supports access to two years of high-quality kindergarten programs for all Victorian children. It will be available for both 3 and 4-year-old kindergarten programs. The funding offsets the funded kindergarten program component of parent fees for children enrolled at a long day care service.

Interactions with Commonwealth Childcare Subsidy

The Victorian Government is finalising arrangements with the Commonwealth to confirm Free Kinder payments is an allowable third-party payment under Commonwealth funding rules to maximise the financial benefits for families. Service providers are required to apply the Free Kinder offset to each families' fees after CCS has been applied. Where a family is eligible for ACCS and do not pay gap fees, the full amount can be applied to improving the quality of the funded kindergarten program.

Interaction with Early Start Kindergarten grants

It is important that you continue to enrol eligible children in Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) at your service. This ensures that you receive all funding entitlements and that eligible children have access to 15 funded hours in a kindergarten program. ESK enrolments also contribute to School Readiness Funding (SRF) calculations and allows the Department to continue to monitor efforts to engage the children in vulnerable circumstances and provide additional targeted support where required.

When a child moves services

If a child moves from one service to another during the kindergarten year, the Free Kinder will move with the child, with the regular payments made to the new service for the duration of time that the child remains at that service. The service the child moves to must also have opted into Free Kinder for it to be applied.

Funding rates

| Service type | 5 hours (3 yr old) | 7.5 hours (3 yr old) | 10 hours (3 yr old) | 15 hours |
|----------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------|
| Free Kinder amount | \$666.67 | \$1000 | \$1,333.33 | \$2,000 |
| Weekly deduction from fees | \$16.60 | \$25 | \$33.33 | \$50 |

More information

You can access more information about Free Kinder [here](#) or contact your regional [ECiB](#).

The following funding is available for long day care services providing a funded kindergarten program with a separate fee schedule:

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy

Families eligible for Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS) can access 5-15 hours of three-year-old and 15 hours of four-year-old kindergarten for free **only** if the kindergarten fees are not attracting any Child Care Subsidy (CCS) or Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS).

A service can charge a per term or per week fee, which would not attract CCS.

In this way, the service could receive Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS) for eligible children along with per capita funding for each eligible child. The kindergarten program fees would be run separately from the long day care kindergarten program daily fees.

Most long day care providers do not offer this fee model, but if you do, it will need to be set up at the beginning of the year. A service may offer this option to support vulnerable children, low-income families, meet a community need or to address any low occupancy rates. It is suggested to offer only this model on set days of the week.

For detailed information, refer to the ACAV publications: Models: Delivering Three-Year -Old Kindergarten in Long Day Care and Models: Delivering Four-Year -Old Kindergarten in Long Day Care.

Connecting you with Victoria's Early Childhood Education & Care sector.

ACA Victoria

 1/1535 Dandenong Road, Oakleigh VIC 3166

 (03) 9532 2017

 vic@childcarealliance.org.au

 vic.childcarealliance.org.au

