



Yarralea Children's Centre

FEES POLICY - QUALITY AREA 7

PURPOSE

This policy provides a clear set of guidelines for:

- the setting, payment and collection of fees
 - ensuring the viability of Yarralea Children's Centre, by setting appropriate fees and charges
 - how Yarralea complies with the Free Kinder initiative
 - the equitable and non-discriminatory application of fees across the programs provided by Yarralea Children's Centre.
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POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

Yarralea Children's Centre is committed to:

- providing responsible financial management of the service, including establishing fees that will result in a financially viable service, while keeping user fees at the lowest possible level
- supporting the Victorian Government's Free Kinder initiative
- providing a fair and manageable system for dealing with non-payment and/or inability to pay fees/outstanding debts
- maintaining confidentiality in relation to the financial circumstances of parents/guardians
- advising users of the service about program government funding and fees to be paid by parents/guardians

SCOPE

This policy applies to the approved provider (Committee), persons with management or control, nominated supervisor (Coordinator), persons in day-to-day charge (Teachers) and, parents/guardians attending Yarralea Children's Centre.

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					
Ensuring that policies and procedures are in place for the payment of fees and the provision of a statement of fees charged by the service (<i>Regulation 168</i>), and take reasonable steps to ensure those policies and procedures are followed (<i>Regulation 170</i>)	R	Ö			
Reviewing the current budget to determine fee income requirements	R	Ö			
Developing a fee policy that balances the parent's/guardian's capacity to pay, with providing a high-quality program and maintaining service viability	R	Ö			
Implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with parents/guardians, the nominated supervisor and staff, and in line with the requirements of the Commonwealth Governments Child Care Subsidy and Additional Child Care Subsidy (<i>refer to Sources</i>)	R	Ö			
Reviewing the effectiveness of the procedures for late payment and support offered	R	Ö			
Considering options for payment when affordability is an issue for families	R	Ö			
Clearly communicating this policy and payment options to families in a culturally sensitive way, and where possible in the family's first language	R	Ö			
Ensuring that the <i>Fees Policy</i> is readily accessible at the service (<i>Regulation 171</i>)	R	Ö			
Providing all parents/guardians with fee information (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>)	R	Ö			
Providing all parents/guardians with a statement of fees and charges upon enrolment of their child/ren	R	Ö			
Providing all parents/guardians with a fee payment agreement (<i>refer to samples in Attachment 2</i>)	R	Ö			
Ensuring fees are collected and receipted	R	Ö			
Collecting all relevant information and maintaining relevant documentation regarding those with entitlement to concessions, where applicable	R	Ö		Ö	

Complying with the service's <i>Privacy and Confidentiality Policy</i> regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of fees	R	Ö			
Notifying parents/guardians a minimum of 14 days before any proposed changes that will affect the fees charged or the way in which fees are collected. (<i>Regulation 172(2)</i>)	R	Ö			
Addressing any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service in a timely manner	R	Ö			
Reading the Yarralea Children's Centre Fee information for families (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>), and complying with the Fee Payment Agreement (<i>refer to Attachments 2</i>)				Ö	
Notifying the approved provider if they are experiencing difficulties with the payment of fees				Ö	

BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

BACKGROUND

Yarralea Children's Centre is a non-profit incorporated association engaged in the running of integrated kindergarten programs for 3-5 year olds.

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 Kinder, 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 Kinder supports families to access a funded kindergarten program by offsetting the funded kindergarten program component of parent fees for three and four-year-old children enrolled at a long day care service

Free kinder 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.

Australian families receive help with the cost of child care through the Child Care Subsidy (CCS). The Australian Government, through the Department of Education (DE) and Services Australia, administers the Child Care Subsidy (CCS). Providers must be approved by the department to receive CCS. DE is responsible for the legislation that underpins CCS. This legislation is called Family Assistance Law (FAL). All providers that receive CCS must follow the rules under FAL. DE monitors providers' compliance with FAL.

The Australian Government subsidises the cost of child care. State and territory governments are responsible for the health, safety, wellbeing and educational outcomes of children. The Australian Government considers that immunisation is an important health measure for children and their families, as it is the safest and most effective way of providing protection against harmful and often deadly diseases. To meet the Child Care Subsidy immunisation requirements, children must be immunised according to the standard vaccination schedule, be on an eligible catch-up vaccination schedule or have an approved exemption from being immunised.

CCS is paid directly to approved providers and passed on to families as a fee reduction.

Additional Child Care Subsidy provides additional fee assistance to support vulnerable or disadvantaged families and children. This support recognises the preventative and protective influence of quality child care on a child's health, wellbeing and development; and the importance of continuity of care.

There are four different payments under Additional Child Care Subsidy:

- Additional Child Care Subsidy (child wellbeing)—to help children who are at risk of serious abuse or neglect.
- Additional Child Care Subsidy (grandparent)—to help grandparents on income support who are the principal caregiver of their grandchildren.
- Additional Child Care Subsidy (temporary financial hardship)—to help families experiencing financial hardship.
- Additional Child Care Subsidy (transition to work)—to help low-income families transitioning from income support to work.

The Inclusion Support Program is designed to assist early childhood education and care services to include children with additional needs by providing support, in the form of practical and tailored advice and strategies on effective inclusive practice, from contracted Inclusion Agencies as well as funding to address more challenging inclusion barriers.

The Community Child Care Fund is designed to help eligible child care providers address barriers to child care participation, particularly in disadvantaged communities, including Indigenous communities. *Regulation 168(2) (n) of Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011* requires that Early Childhood Education and Care services have a comprehensive written fees policy, and the content of this policy must be communicated to families. The policy must include a written statement about the fees to be charged and the payment process. All families must be informed of applicable fees at the time of enrolment.

LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS

Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

- A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999
- A New Tax System (Family Assistance) (Administration) Act 1999
- A New Tax System (Family Assistance and Related Measures) Act 2000
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 (Vic)
- Child Care Subsidy Minister's Rules 2017
- Child Care Subsidy Secretary's Rules 2017
- 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

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.

Centrelink: The agency that delivers payments and services to individuals and families on behalf of the Australian Government.

Child Care Safety Net: Targeted assistance to vulnerable and at-risk children and their families, as well as supporting child care services in disadvantaged communities to address barriers in accessing child care. The Child Care Safety Net has three components:

- Additional Child Care Subsidy
- Community Child Care Fund
- Inclusion Support Program

Child Care Subsidy (CCS): A Commonwealth Government means tested subsidy to assist eligible parents/guardians with the cost of child care. Payments are paid directly to approved child care providers.

Early Start Kindergarten (ESK): A funding program that provides eligible children 15 hours of free or low cost kindergarten program each week for two years before starting school. To be eligible a child must be 3 by 30 April in the year they start kindergarten and be from a refugee or asylum seeker background, or identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, or the family has had contact with child protection. Details are available at: www.vic.gov.au/early-start-kindergarten If a child is eligible for ESK, they should be enrolled in ESK, even where Free Kinder and/or 15 hours per week of funded three-year old kindergarten is offered. This ensures eligible children have priority access to 15 hours of funded kindergarten provided by an early childhood teacher and that service providers receive additional funding and support. 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.

Excursion/service event charge: An additional charge that may be 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*).

DebitSuccess: A third party provider that processes payments of fees.

Fees: A charge for program hours over and above the funded hours.

Free Kinder: A Victorian Government Best Start, Best Life initiative providing Free Kinder programs for four-year-old and three-year-old children in funded services, that have opted into the initiative. Free Kinder supports families to access a funded kindergarten program by offsetting the funded kindergarten program component of parent fees for 3 and 4-year-old children enrolled at a long day care service.

Funded Kindergarten: The Victorian Government provides funding to support children to access a high-quality kindergarten program in the two years before they start school. The funding is a contribution towards meeting the cost of the kindergarten program. Funded kindergartens charge fees to help meet the cost of running kindergarten programs. Fees are set by individual kindergartens and depend on things like how many hours children attend and whether there are extra costs such as excursions.

Enrolment fee deposit: A charge to secure a place that has been offered in a program at the Yarralea Children's Centre

Health Care Card: A Commonwealth Government entitlement providing concessions for low-income earners and other eligible people. Details are available at <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/health-care-card>

Holiday Program: Full day program provided in school holiday term breaks for children up to age 8, including the week before school returns in January. This is an opt-in program and does not incorporate the Free Kinder funding.

Kindergarten: Kindergarten (sometimes known as preschool) is a universal early childhood program, funded by the state government, for children in the two years prior to commencing primary school. It may also include an unfunded program for three-year-old children (two years before school).

Multi-Age Program: A program for 1 - 6-year olds conducted in morning and afternoon sessions.

Late collection fee: A charge that may be imposed by the approved provider when parents/guardians are late to collect their child/children from the program (*refer to Attachment 1*)

SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

SOURCES

- Department of Education: Child Care Subsidy (CCS): www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/child-care-subsidy
- The Child Care Provider Handbook: www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/resources/child-care-provider-handbook

RELATED POLICIES

- Compliments and Complaints
 - Delivery and Collection of Children
 - Enrolment and Orientation
 - Excursions and Service Events
 - Inclusion and Equity
 - Privacy and Confidentiality
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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
 - monitor the number of families/children excluded from the service because of their inability to pay fees
 - keep the policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy and best practice
 - 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)*)
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ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: Fee information for families
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AUTHORISATION

This policy was reviewed and updated in 2024.

POLICY NOTES:

2024 Edition includes Free Kinder and reflects the 2024 structure change of 8am – 6pm for all bookings.

ATTACHMENT 1. FREE KINDER AND FEE INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

Yarralea Children’s Centre 2024

1. General information

Yarralea Children’s Centre abides by the *Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Jobs for Families Child Care Package) Act 2017* (refer to *Legislation and standards*). The Child Care Subsidy helps by assisting families with their child care fees and provides greater assistance to low and middle-income families. The Child Care Safety Net provides families and services extra support if they are vulnerable and disadvantaged or located in a regional or remote community.

Hours of operation	Monday to Friday, 8am – 6pm
Planned Closures	4 weeks over December/January (see www.yarralea.com.au for specific dates)

Kindergarten programs for four-year-old (15 hours) and eligible three-year-old children (5 – 15 hours) in Victorian Government funded services will save families up to \$2,500 for each child enrolled in a participating funded kindergarten program as part of the Best Start, Best Life reform.

2. What free Kinder means at our service

Yarralea Children’s Centre has opted in to the Free Kinder initiative. Parent fees will be reduced by the Free Kinder Funding for eligible children enrolled in 3 and 4 -year-old kindergarten.

Some children may not be eligible for Funded Kinder. For example if:

- The child is enrolled in a funded kindergarten program at another service.
- The child has received 3 or 4 year old funding previously and they are not eligible for another year of kindergarten funding.

Children not eligible for Free Kinder will be charged fees as per the Fee Schedule for that year.

Any deposit (*refer to Definitions*) made will be reimbursable towards Term 1 fees.

3. How fees are set

As part of the budget development process, Yarralea Children’s Centre sets fees each year for the programs of the service, taking into consideration:

- the financial viability of the service
- the level of government funding provided
- the availability of other income sources, such as grants
- the fees charged by similar services in the area
- the capacity of parents/guardians to pay fees
- reasonable expenditure in meeting agreed program quality and standards
- requirements of Child Care Subsidy : www.education.gov.au

Once fees are set for the year, they will only be reviewed in extraordinary circumstances, for example, if enrolments drop and the service is at risk of not being able to meet its expenses.

4. Other charges

Other charges levied by Yarralea Children’s Centre include:

- **Excursion/service event charge:** 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 fee:** Yarralea Children's Centre 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 Yarralea Children's Centre. The Committee of Management reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when parents/guardians are late in collecting a child from the service. In this situation, If the parent/carer is late, a fine of \$15.00 for every 15 minutes, or part thereof, from the conclusion of the day, will be imposed.

5. Statement of fees and charges

A statement of fees and charges will be provided to families on enrolment (*refer to Attachment 2*).

6. Payment of fees

Yarralea Children's Centre will regularly review payment options and procedures to ensure that they are inclusive and sensitive to families' cultural and financial situations.

Fees will be direct debited on a 2 weekly basis. Invoices will show any childcare subsidy payments made by the Commonwealth Government and the remaining gap fee is to be paid by parents/carers. Statements will be provided for all fee payments.

Parents/guardians experiencing difficulty in paying fees are requested to contact the Office Manager 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.

7. Cancellation of booking

Families are asked to provide 2 weeks' notice in writing of the cancellation of a booking. Fees will continue to apply for the 2 weeks' notice period regardless of whether the child attends during this 2 week period.

In respect to any Holiday Program bookings, families must give Yarralea Children's Centre at least 48 hours' notice of any cancellations. Fees will be charged for any Holiday Program bookings which are cancelled less than 48 hours prior to the booking.

7. Unpaid fees

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.
- Yarralea Children's Centre 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.

7. Refund of fees

Fees are non-refundable (exceptional circumstances may apply – these are at the discretion of the approved provider (Committee)/nominated supervisor (Coordinator). There will be no refund of fees in the following circumstances:

- a child's short-term illness
- family holiday during operational times

- 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.

8. Fundraising

Fundraising is undertaken to meet the balance and/or pay for additional items for the service. While participation in fundraising is voluntary, the support of every family is encouraged. Fundraising activities are also an opportunity for families and communities to come together.

9. Support services

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

10. 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.