

# 2021 FREE KINDERGARTEN FEES 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 Community Kinders Plus (CKP) ensuring it is only used to ensure the quality of program delivery and development of children enrolled in the service, 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 CKP, 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

### VALUES

Community Kinders Plus (CKP) 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

### SCOPE

This policy applies to CKP, 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 CKP.

## 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

## DEFINITIONS

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

**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](http://www.education.vic.gov.au). Children that are eligible for Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) will continue to be enrolled, this ensures 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 charge.

**Fees:** A charge for program hours over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 per year) and/or Late Collection Fee.

**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](http://www.humanservices.gov.au)

**Kindergarten fee/Enrolment 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.

**Late Collection Fee:** Care that is provided by a kindergarten service to kindergarten children outside of the 15 hours per week program.

**Debt Collection Fee:** A charge for unpaid accounts which have been forwarded to Debt Collection.

## 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](http://www.education.vic.gov.au)

### 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*

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## 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). 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)

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 CKP 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, CKP 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 Late Collections.

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)

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 CKP of any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service.

Referring parents'/guardians' questions in relation to this policy CKP.

### **Parents/guardians are responsible for:**

Reading the Community Kinders Plus 2021 Free Kindergarten information for families (refer to Attachment 1).

Notifying CKP if experiencing difficulties with payments.

Providing agreement in writing if any additional payments are made to the Kinder.

## **EVALUATION**

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, CKP 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

## **AUTHORISATION**

This policy was adopted by Community Kinders Plus on **25/01/2021**.

**REVIEW DATE:** 15/12/2021

## 2021 Free Kindergarten information for families



### Community Kinders Plus 2021

#### 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.

#### What free kindergarten means at our service

CKP has opted in to the 2021 Free Kindergarten initiative. Applicable parent fees are outlined below:

Funded sessional kindergarten for 4-year-old children (15 hours per week) - no parent fee

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)

CKP 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.)

#### Other charges

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

These include:

**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 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

#### 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.

#### Payment of fees

The Committee of Management/Board 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. Receipts will be provided on request for all fee payments.

Parents/guardians experiencing difficulty in paying fees are requested to contact the Finance Officer 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.

## **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.

The Committee of Management/Board 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.

## **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. A Non-refundable administration fee 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.

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.

## **Children turning three during the year of enrolment for unfunded 3-year-old kindergarten**

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.

## **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.

## **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.