

FEES – FUNDED KINDERGARTEN

QUALITY AREA 7 | ELAA version 1.3



PURPOSE

This policy provides a clear set of guidelines for:

- the setting, payment and collection of fees
- ensuring the viability of ECKA, by setting appropriate fees and charges
- the equitable and non-discriminatory application of fees across the programs provided by ECKA.



POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

ECKA 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
- providing a fair and manageable system for dealing with non-payment and/or inability to pay fees/outstanding debts
- 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
- advising users of the service about program funding, including government support and fees to be paid by parents/guardians
- providing equitable access for families eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy and/or Early Start Kindergarten.

SCOPE

This policy applies to the approved provider, persons with management or control, nominated supervisor, persons in day-to-day charge and parents/guardians attending services managed by ECKA.

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
Reviewing the current budget to determine fee income requirements	√	√			
Developing a fee policy that balances the parent's/guardian's capacity to pay, with providing a high-quality program and maintaining service viability	√	√			
Implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with parents/guardians, the nominated supervisor and staff, and in line with the requirements of DET's The Kindergarten Funding Guide (<i>refer to Sources</i>)	√	√			
Considering any issues regarding fees that may be a barrier to families enrolling at ECKA and removing those barriers wherever possible	√	√			
Reviewing the effectiveness of the procedures for late payment and support offered	√	√			
Considering options for payment when affordability is an issue for families	√	√			
In long day care settings, where Child Care Subsidy or Additional Child Care Subsidy is applicable, ensure that all subsidies a child is eligible for are applied to reduce cost to families (CCS and ACCS can be accessed in combination with the Early Start Kindergarten grants)	√	√			
Providing communication to families explaining their access to one funded kindergarten program per child, per year.	√	√			
Clearly communicating this policy and payment options to families in a culturally-sensitive way, and in the family's first language where possible	√	√			
Ensuring that the <i>Fees Policy</i> is readily accessible at the service (<i>Regulation 171</i>)	√	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with fee information (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>)	√	√			
Providing all parents/guardians with a statement of fees and charges upon enrolment of their child	√	√			

Ensuring fees are collected and receipted	√	√			
Collecting all relevant information and maintaining relevant documentation regarding those with entitlement to concessions (<i>refer to Definitions</i>)	√	√		√	
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	√	√			
Notifying parents/guardians a minimum of 14 days of any proposed changes to the fees charged or the way in which the fees are collected (<i>Regulation 172(2)</i>), and ideally providing one term's notice.	√	√			
Addressing any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service in a timely manner	√	√			
Reading the ECKA Fee information for families (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>)				√	
Notifying the approved provider if experiencing difficulties with the payment of fees				√	
Providing the required documentation to enable the service to claim the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy and/or Early Start Kindergarten, if eligible (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>).				√	
BOLD tick √ indicates legislation requirement					



BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

BACKGROUND

The Department of Education and Training (DET) (*refer to Definitions*) provides funding for each child who is enrolled and attending a funded kindergarten program two years before school. Income from other sources, primarily fees, is required to meet all the additional costs incurred by the service in the delivery of the children's program. In addition, the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (*refer to Definitions*) enables eligible children to attend a funded kindergarten program free of charge two years before school.

DET also funds Early Start Kindergarten for three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from refugee or asylum seeker background and children known to Child Protection, to access kindergarten programs as outlined in The Kindergarten Funding Guide (*refer to Sources*).

Regulation 168(2) (n) of Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 requires that funded kindergarten 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 term and annual fees at the time of enrolment. Services must also advise eligible families of the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (*refer to Definitions*) and/or or Early Start Kindergarten (*refer to Definitions*) arrangements. The fees charged must comply with the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy requirements (*refer to Definitions*) and/or or Early Start Kindergarten (*refer to Definitions*) and be responsive to the local community and the viability of the service. The Kindergarten Funding Guide (*refer to Sources*) outlines the criteria to be covered in the policy.

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

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.

Children/families experiencing vulnerability and/or disadvantage (in relation to this policy): children are vulnerable if the capacity of parents and family to effectively care, protect and provide for their long-term development and wellbeing is limited. Some factors which may contribute to a child experiencing vulnerability include: a child with a disability; living in a family with a low income, or one which is experiencing problems with housing, domestic violence, substance abuse, or mental health; known to child protection; in statutory out-of-home care; Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, having a culturally and linguistically diverse background; having a young or sole parent, or a parent with a disability (adapted from the Kindergarten Funding Guide)

Concession: A Commonwealth Government entitlement providing concessions for low-income earners and other eligible people. This includes one of the following:

- a Commonwealth Health Care Card
- a Commonwealth Pensioner Concession Card
- a Department of Veterans Affairs Gold Card or White Card
- Refugee or Asylum Seeker visa (200-204, 786 or 866)
- Bridging visas for any of the above Refugee or Asylum Seeker visas
- Multiple Births (triplets or more)

Early Start Kindergarten (ESK): Early Start Kindergarten provides eligible children with 15 hours of free or low-cost kindergarten each week led by a qualified Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registered teacher. 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, or
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, or
- known to child protection.

These children can also access free year-before-school kindergarten through the ESK Extension Grant regardless of whether they have accessed ESK in the previous year.

Early Start Kindergarten extension grants: provides a free or low cost year-before-school kindergarten program for children:

- not eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy
- who participated in Access to Early Learning in the previous year or are from a refugee or asylum seeker background, or Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, or known to child protection. A child is not required to access ESK in the previous year to access the ESK extension grant.

High priority families: as defined in the Kindergarten Guide this includes:

- Children at risk of abuse or neglect, including children in Out-of-Home Care
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children
- Asylum seeker and refugee children
- Children eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy
 - A child or parent holds a Commonwealth Health Care Card, Pensioner Concession Card, Veteran's Affairs Card, or multiple birth children (triplets, quadruplets)
- Children with additional needs, defined as children who:
 - require additional assistance in order to fully participate in the kindergarten program
 - require a combination of services which are individually planned
 - have an identified specific disability or developmental delay

Fees: A charge for a place within a program at the service.

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS): A state government subsidy paid in addition to per capita grants to subsidise the costs of parent fees and enable eligible children to attend a funded kindergarten for 15 hours free of charge (The Kindergarten Funding Guide (*refer to Sources*))

Late collection charge: 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

- The Kindergarten Funding Guide (Department of Education and Training): www.education.vic.gov.au
- The constitution of ECKA

RELATED POLICIES

- Complaints and Grievances
- Delivery and Collection of Children
- Enrolment and Orientation
- Excursions and Service Events
- 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
- investigating what measures can be taken to reduce any barriers to access the program, especially for vulnerable and disadvantaged children
- 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 \(2\)](#))

ATTACHMENTS



- Attachment 1: Fee information for families

AUTHORISATION



This policy was adopted by the approved provider of ECKA on 2/7/2019.

REVIEW DATE: 01/11/2022

ATTACHMENT 1. FEE INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

1. General information

The Department of Education and Training (DET) (*refer to Definitions*) provides funding for each child enrolled and attending kindergarten in the two years before school as a contribution toward the costs of providing the program. Services meet the balance of costs through charging fees and fundraising activities.

The Commonwealth Government provides a Childcare Subsidy under the Family Assistance Law that enables eligible families to access eligible long day care and occasional care services delivered by ECKA.

DET provides a Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (see below) that enables children from eligible families to attend a kindergarten program free of charge in the two years before school.

DET also provides Early Start Kindergarten funding to assist eligible three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, from a refugee or asylum seeker background or children known to Child Protection, to access kindergarten programs.

ECKA provides a range of support options to parents/guardians experiencing difficulty with payment of fees (see below).

2. How fees are set

As part of the budget development process, the Board 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 for the program, including the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy and Early Start Kindergarten
- 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 The Kindergarten Funding Guide (Department of Education and Training) available from the DET website: www.education.vic.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.

3. Other charges

Other charges include:

- **Late collection charge:** The 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 Board.

4. Statement of fees and charges

A statement of fees and charges for three- and four-year-old kindergarten and long day care and occasional care will be provided to families on enrolment.

5. Fundraising

Not all service costs are covered by DET per capita funding and the fees charged. 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.

6. Subsidies

6.1 Kindergarten Fee Subsidy

The Kindergarten Fee Subsidy is provided by DET and enables eligible children to attend 15 hours of kindergarten free of charge. Eligibility conditions may change from time-to-time and must be checked in the most recent edition of the Kindergarten Funding Guide (*refer to Sources*).

Your child is eligible for the kindergarten fee subsidy:

- if your child identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- if your child is identified on their birth certificate as being a multiple birth child (triplets or more).

or if your child holds or has a parent or guardian who holds, one of the following:

- a Commonwealth Health Care Card
- a Commonwealth Pensioner Concession Card
- a Department of Veterans Affairs Gold Card or White Card
- Refugee or Asylum Seeker visa (200-204, 786 or 866)
- Bridging visas for any of the above Refugee or Asylum Seeker visas

If your family or child has a humanitarian or refugee visa listed by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection which is not included in the above list, your child may still be eligible for the kindergarten fee subsidy.

Where a child is identified by a parent, carer or legal guardian as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, no verification is required.

In all other instances, supporting documentation should be sighted by the service on acceptance of a place or on commencement in the program, however where there are delays, such as in obtaining health care cards for children in out-of-home care, the delay should not provide a barrier to the child accessing the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy. Families are eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy for the full term in which their concession is valid.

6.2 Early Start Kindergarten

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:

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

Children can also access free or low cost Four-Year-Old Kindergarten through the Early Start Kindergarten Extension Grant. Contact the service for further information.

6.3 Child Care Subsidy (CCS)

Child Care Subsidy (CCS) is an Australian Government subsidy that can assist eligible families with the cost of child care in long day care services. ECKA is an approved/registered care provider in a limited number of services.

7. Payment of fees

The 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. The first term's fees must be received in full within 14 days of the child commencing at the service. For children enrolled after the commencement of a term, a pro rata invoice will be issued and must be paid in full within 14 days of the child's commencement at the service. Receipts will be provided for all fee payments.

For children enrolled in funded three year old program who turn three between January and 30th of April, children cannot commence until they turn three and the fee will be a prorated invoice which must be paid within 14 days of commencing.

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

8. Unpaid fees

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

- An initial reminder text, letter or email 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 contacted again and invited to discuss the range of support options available and establish a payment plan.
- Failure to make a payment arrangement or continued non-payment may result in a second and final notice 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 notice will also include information on a range of support options available for the family.
- ECKA 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.

9. Refund of fees

If a family becomes eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy during a term, a full refund of the applicable term fees will be provided. Fees may still apply for programs offering more than the required minimum hours per week.

In any other case, fees are non-refundable (exceptional circumstances may apply – these are at the discretion of the Board). There will be no refund of fees in the following circumstances:

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

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

10. 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.

11. Notification of fee changes during the year

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

ATTACHMENT 2

CHILDCARE FEE INFORMATION:

1. Billing

Families will be billed on a fortnightly basis. Families are expected to pay the gap fee shown on the invoice each fortnight and not allow fees to fall more than two weeks into arrears. The invoice will detail the days and times of attendance in childcare, the childcare subsidy paid by the government and any parent payments.

2. PUBLIC HOLIDAYS AND CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY CLOSURE PERIOD.

Fees are not charged when the service is closed for public holidays and the Christmas holiday closure period.

3. FAMILY HOLIDAYS AND NON-ATTENDANCE DAYS

When a child does not attend the service for reasons such as illness or holidays, families will continue to be charged for services according to the child's regular/permanent booking.

Families who take extended holiday periods but wish to hold their child's place at the Centre will be expected to pay the regular fees for the place at the Centre.

4. ABSENTEEISM

If a child is to be absent for the day, parents are requested to telephone the service as soon as possible to inform educators. If the child is sick, it is important to inform the service of the nature of the illness, symptoms and any diagnosis is helpful in containing the spread of illness.

5. ECKA ANNUAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DAY

ECKA believes that ongoing professional development and training is vital for our staff to remain at the forefront of their profession and continue to provide quality early childhood education and care. ECKA may close the service one day per year to allow all educators to attend a professional development day. On this day all ECKA Services will be closed. Families will need to arrange alternative care for their children on this day and will be notified of the day in advance. Families will not be charged for services on this day.

6. CANCELLATION OF BOOKING

Families are required to provide 2 weeks' notice of the cancellation of a booking. Fees will continue to apply for the two weeks' notice period unless cancellation of booking is due to an illness and a medical certificate is provided.

7. FEE SUBSIDY ENTITLEMENTS

Australian families will need to satisfy the Australian Governments Activity test to be eligible for childcare subsidy. More information about eligibility can be found at <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/child-care-subsidy> or telephone the FAO on 136 150.

8. KINDERGARTEN ONLY

Long Day care services offering a funded sessional kindergarten program for families who only want to attend kindergarten should see the information for kindergarten fees in Attachment 1 of this policy.

9. COMBINED KINDERGARTEN AND LONG DAY CARE FEES:

Families who attend integrated kindergarten in the long day care program will be subjected to the fee information in the following table:

SESSION TYPE	EXAMPLE
<p>Child attends Childcare and 5hrs of funded 3yo or 4yo Kindergarten within a childcare session.</p>	<p>3yo Examples: <u>Tuesday:</u> Full day of childcare. Full day fee. <u>Wednesday:</u> Half day childcare session with no kinder. Half day fee. <u>Friday:</u> 3yo 5-hour Kindergarten session with after Kinder Care. Full day fee.</p> <p>4yo Example: <u>Monday:</u> 5-hour 4yo Kindergarten session with after Kinder Childcare. Full day fee. <u>Tuesday:</u> Full day of care which includes a 5-hour Kinder session. Full day fee.</p>
<p>Child attends Childcare and a separate day of funded 3yo OR 4yo Kindergarten only.</p>	<p>3yo Example: <u>Monday:</u> Full day of childcare. Full day fee. <u>Wednesday:</u> Full day of care with no Kinder session: Full day fee. <u>Friday:</u> 3yo 5-hour Kindergarten session only. Half day fee.</p> <p>4yo Example: <u>Wednesday:</u> 4yo 5-hour Kindergarten session only. Half day fee. <u>Thursday:</u> Full day of care which includes a 5-hour Kinder session. Full day fee. <u>Friday:</u> Half day childcare session with no kinder. Half day fee.</p>
	<p><i>In line with Department of Education and Training Victoria guidelines, Concession Card Kindergarten fee subsidies are not payable to parents who receive Childcare Subsidies.</i></p>

