

2021 FREE KINDER FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Question	Answer
General	
What was announced?	<p>An investment of up to \$169.6 million will save families around \$2,000 for each child enrolled in a participating funded kindergarten program in 2021.</p> <p>Subsidies will be offered to early childhood services providing funded programs, meaning free kinder for children attending their funded sessional kindergarten programs. It will also mean reduced fees for children enrolled in their funded kindergarten programs in a long day care centre.</p> <p>For those families that have children attending unfunded three-year-old programs in sessional kindergarten services, there will also be reduced fees of approximately \$40 a week.</p>
How will Free Kinder help children?	<p>Study after study has shown that investment in quality early childhood services is one of the most effective ways to set children up for life. Quality early learning before school helps young children to thrive, supports the development of the whole child and improves children's achievement at school.</p> <p>International research links quality preschool with better cognitive outcomes, improved independence, concentration and social skills.</p> <p>Increasing access to quality kindergarten programs also ensures greater equity to support all children, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to learn and thrive.</p>
How will Free Kinder initiative help parents – especially women?	<p>Free Kinder forms part of the economic recovery support for Victorians during 2021 as Victoria recovers from the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and will mean reduced cost of living for Victorian families.</p> <p>The initiative supports workforce participation for families, but especially for women, who are often the primary caregivers for children, and have been disproportionately affected by the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.</p>
How much funding is available per child?	<p>Sessional kindergarten services will be supported to provide a free, 15-hour kindergarten through an additional per child payment of \$2,122.</p> <p>Long day care services with a funded kindergarten program will receive an additional child payment of \$2,000 to directly offset parent fees.</p>

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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General	
	<p>The child must be in a funded kindergarten place in that service.</p> <p>Sessional kindergarten services with an unfunded three-year-old program will be able to access a per child payment of \$1,600 for each enrolment in a program of five or more hours per week. Where programs are less than five hours, this amount will be on a pro-rata basis.</p> <p>This Free Kinder funding is <u>on top</u> of all normal kindergarten funding streams excluding the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS), the KFS Ratio Supplement and the Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) Extension Grant, as these rates have been incorporated into the Free Kinder subsidy.</p> <p>The KFS and KFS Ratio Supplement normally provide a free program for eligible vulnerable or disadvantaged children in a sessional program, while the ESK Extension Grant provides additional support for vulnerable children in a long day care setting. The Free Kinder funding is a higher amount and replaces these subsidies in participating services in 2021.</p>
Will kinder be free for all children from now on?	<p>This initiative is a response to the social and economic impacts of coronavirus (COVID-19), particularly the impact on women and is for 2021 only.</p>
How is this different from the free kinder support provided in 2020?	<p>Across Terms 2-4 in 2020, the Victorian Government has provided funding to sessional kindergarten services to support them to offer kindergarten for free during the period of the coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions.</p> <p>In contrast to free kindergarten in 2020, this initiative provides funding support to all children receiving a funded kinder program, regardless of what type of service they attend. This captures the approximately 30 per cent of children who receive their funded kinder program in a long day care setting.</p> <p>This investment does more to support families, including those who choose long day care kindergarten because it suits their circumstances.</p>

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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<p>What are you doing to support the kinder workforce and ensure there is the workforce needed in place?</p>	<p>The Victorian Government is providing a range of generous scholarships and incentives for people wanting to become kindergarten teachers and for kindergarten teachers that are considering teaching in regional areas.</p> <p>The Victorian Budget 2020/21 includes a \$4.8 million investment to enable 76 Victorian educators to fast-track their studies to become an early qualified early childhood teacher.</p> <p>We are also providing more support than ever before for the professional development of service leaders, teachers and educators, to make kindergarten programs an even better place to work.</p> <p>The Victorian funding in this year's budget builds on those made last year. In that budget, the Government invested \$92.4 million to support early childhood teachers and educators through more professional development, mentoring and scholarships, so that as Three-Year-Old Kindergarten rolls out across Victoria, our children continue to have access to highly-trained professionals. Educators are encouraged to register their interest for an accelerated learning program at https://www.vic.gov.au/your-fast-track-becoming-early-childhood-teacher.</p>
<p>Who is eligible?</p>	<p>All families with a child enrolled in a funded kindergarten program are eligible for Free Kinder, in either sessional or long day care services that take up this offer. This includes all children attending funded kindergarten programs in the year before school (Four-Year-Old Kindergarten).</p> <p>Services offering funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten will also be eligible for Free Kinder. In 2021, 21 local government areas will be offering funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten. For a list of these areas, families are encouraged to visit vic.gov.au/kinder.</p>

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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<p>What is the financial benefit to families of this initiative? What are some examples?</p>	<p>This initiative will mean a reduction in kinder fees of around \$2,000 over the 2021 kinder year. This saving is for a full 15-hour program over 40 weeks.</p> <p>For example, a family with a child who attends a kindergarten program in a long day care centre across two days a week, with a daily fee of \$120 and Child Care Subsidy rate of 65 per cent, will have their out of pocket fees reduced by approximately half. Their weekly cost will drop from \$84 to approximately \$42.</p> <p>A family with a child enrolled in a typical, participating community kindergarten for a sessional, 15-hour program will pay nothing all year, instead of paying around \$2,000 in out-of-pocket fees.</p> <p>There will be some examples with funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten where children receive less than a 15-hour kindergarten program each week. In these cases, funding will be adjusted according to program hours.</p> <p>For example, a family with a child enrolled in a participating service delivering a funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program for five hours a week in 2021 will pay no fees all year, instead of paying around \$600.</p>
<p>How will Free Kinder help kindergarten services?</p>	<p>This initiative will help funded sessional and long day care kindergarten services to keep families enrolled in and attending their services and to attract new families, which will help keep services financially viable.</p> <p>Around 4,700 early childhood education teachers and 6,300 early childhood educators work in funded kindergarten programs in Victoria. This initiative will give these workers more job security. It will also support those who own and manage these services – including local government, community and parent groups, and businesses.</p>
<p>Will payments be made directly to families?</p>	<p>Payments will be made to participating service providers delivering a funded kindergarten, not directly to families. This will enable participating sessional kindergarten services to offer a free 15-hour kindergarten program and long day care services to provide a reduction in fees of \$2,000. This is a flat amount regardless of the number of days attended and the family's out of pocket costs.</p> <p>If a sessional kindergarten service normally charges less than this amount in parent fees, the surplus can be used to support the broader service, for example to support the quality of the kindergarten program and the engagement of children.</p>

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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What if a child attends both sessional kindergarten and long day care service, will Free Kinder apply in each setting?	<p>The Free Kinder funding is available at the service where a child receives their funded kindergarten program. Where a child attends both a sessional kindergarten and a long day care service, this must be nominated by the family but will normally be the sessional kindergarten. Families cannot receive the benefit twice – it attaches to one kindergarten program only.</p> <p>It is the responsibility of kindergarten services to make clear to families that they can only access their funded kindergarten program, including Free Kinder, at one service in line with normal kindergarten funding guidelines.</p>
What if a child moves from one service to another during the year?	<p>Some children move from one service to another during the kindergarten year. In these cases, the Free Kinder will move with the child, with the regular payments made to the new service for the rest of the year (or the duration of time that the child remains at that service).</p>
Can families access a second year of kindergarten as part of the Free Kinder initiative?	<p>Children who have delays in two or more key areas of development and would benefit from a second year of kindergarten, as determined by an early childhood teacher, will be able to attract the Free Kinder funding.</p> <p>If a child is not eligible for a second year of a funded kindergarten in line with current Departmental policy, then they will not be able to access the Free Kinder funding.</p>
Do kindergarten services have to participate in this initiative?	<p>No. Like the current 2020 free kindergarten initiative in sessional kindergarten services, it is not compulsory for services, including long day care services to accept this offer.</p> <p>However, as kindergarten fees are normally around \$1,700 to \$2,000 per year (in sessional settings), it is expected that there will be high take-up of this initiative. In deciding whether to participate or not, service providers should take account of all their kindergarten funding streams including the Early Childhood Teacher Supplement for experienced teachers and the Ratio Supplement for enrolments in eligible sessional groups of 23 or more children.</p>
Will kindergarten providers receiving Commonwealth JobKeeper funding be eligible?	<p>Kindergarten providers that receive Commonwealth JobKeeper payments prior to their phasing out in March 2021 are eligible for Free Kinder payments in full for the whole year.</p>

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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What if a family has already paid a deposit or fees for 2021?	If a sessional service is participating in the Free Kinder initiative in 2021, any fee payments that have already been made must be returned to families in full within a reasonable timeframe (excluding any voluntary parent donation that the parent has agreed to).
Our parent fees are less than the per child funding amount. What happens to the surplus funding?	<p>If a sessional or long day care kindergarten service normally charges less than the Free Kinder amount in parent fees, the surplus funding can be used to support the broader service.</p> <p>Any surplus funding must be used for directly supporting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the quality of the teaching and learning in the kindergarten program and/or • attendance at the service, including for vulnerable children and families not yet enrolled and/or • the change management required for preparing for Three-Year-Old Kindergarten (in 2022 roll-out areas). <p>It must not be used to support the usual costs of running the service, or to support a profit at the service. Further advice will be provided on records required to be kept in relation to any surplus funding, for the purposes of an audit.</p> <p>Any surplus funds should be used at that kindergarten service it is accrued for during 2021 and not for other services operated by the Service Provider.</p>
How does this interact with Three-Year-Old Kindergarten?	<p>This initiative works with the Three-Year-Old Kindergarten reform.</p> <p>Over 580 children are already benefitting from Three-Year-Old Kindergarten in six local government areas. Children in 15 additional local government areas will benefit from Three-Year-Old Kindergarten next year with state-wide roll out from 2022. Learn more about Three-Year-Old Kindergarten reform, including roll-out LGA schedule at vic.gov.au/kinder</p> <p>Children receiving a funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program in one of the 21 local government areas delivering the reform next year will be eligible for Free Kinder.</p>

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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General	
Can a service with funded kindergarten and unfunded 3YO choose certain parts from the Free Kinder package?	<p>No. Funded sessional kindergarten services cannot “cherry pick” from within the Free Kinder initiative. Participating services that have a funded kindergarten program must take the Free Kinder offer if they wish to access the unfunded three-year-old kindergarten funding.</p> <p>Services that only offer unfunded three-year-old kindergarten are eligible to accept this offer.</p>
Our service charges a separate, non-refundable deposit to cover costs involved with processing enrolments. Will these need to be reimbursed if we are offering Free Kinder?	<p>If a service is participating in the Free Kinder initiative in 2021, any fee payments including an enrolment deposit that would normally be taken off Term 1 fees cannot be retained for children enrolled at the service. Non-refundable enrolment administration fees paid prior to the kindergarten year can be retained.</p> <p>All services may receive voluntary parent payments that a parent has explicitly agreed to, in writing, or conduct other fundraising activities, as well as receiving Free Kinder payments, if all terms and conditions are met.</p> <p>If fees have already been paid, the full amount should be refunded in a timely way.</p>
Are we permitted to ask families for a donation per term to make up the shortfall?	<p>All services may receive voluntary parent payments or conduct other fundraising activities, as well as receiving Free Kinder payments, if all terms and conditions are met.</p> <p>Services can invite parents/carers who have already paid fees to voluntarily and explicitly agree that some or all of their fees are retained as a donation to the service.</p>
Can we charge a ‘maintenance fee’ for all parents, or for those who choose not to attend working bees?	<p>Parents cannot be charged a maintenance fee / levy regardless of whether they attend a working bee or not. Any parent contribution must be completely voluntarily.</p>

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Question	Answer
Provider Payment and Administration	
When will services start receiving the Free Kinder funding?	<p>Sessional kindergarten services who opt-in to Free Kindergarten by 16 December will receive the equivalent of the first term of their Free Kindergarten payment for their funded program as a lump sum in January. After this, it will be paid monthly through the KIM system as per normal kindergarten payments.</p> <p>Long day care providers will receive their Free Kindergarten program as monthly prorated payments through the KIM system from February.</p> <p>Further information will be provided shortly on the exact mechanics and timing of payments and on administration and record keeping requirements. Services are encouraged to visit Free kinder (education.vic.gov.au).</p>
If a child starts midway through the year, is the payment prorated, or do they still get the full amount?	The funding will be paid monthly through the KIM system as per normal kindergarten payments, so children who commence midway through the year will attract a pro rata amount for the time spent in the kindergarten program. The Free Kindergarten funding will not form part of a service's baseline funding, so payments will cease for children who leave during the year.
Do I need to enrol children eligible for ESK?	Yes, it is important that you continue to enrol eligible children in Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) at your service. 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.
How does the policy relate to families with Health Care Cards or Pension Cards?	As everyone is receiving free kindergarten, the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy criteria doesn't apply. Families won't be required to show their health care or pension card to receive Free Kindergarten, however service providers should still collect this information and record this in the KIM system.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Question	Answer
Sessional kindergarten programs	
<p>What if a sessional kinder service charges more than \$2,122 per child?</p>	<p>Providers can choose whether or not to take up this initiative. The intention is for as many Victorian children as possible to have access to a free kindergarten program.</p> <p>Funded sessional kindergarten service providers accessing this funding would be required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide a free kindergarten program in 2021 for both three and four-year old funded sessional enrolments for 15 hours a week (except for funded Three-Year-Old programs offering less than 15 hours in 2021) • not charge any compulsory out-of-pocket fees to families at participating services (although voluntary fundraising would be permitted) • refund any parent fees in full that have already been paid for 2021 in a reasonable timeframe (excluding any agreed voluntary donation). <p>In considering whether to take up this offer, services should consider their whole financial position including other sources of income, and the positive effect of this offer on supporting enrolments.</p>
<p>For funded kindergarten programs, where a sessional service charges parent fees above \$2,122, are services able to directly offset this against fees and still charge the family the gap?</p>	<p>No. Where a sessional kindergarten service charges a fee above the Free Kinder amount, they will be required to provide a free 15 hour kindergarten program and not charge families any compulsory out-of-pocket fees including enrolment deposits or maintenance levies.</p> <p>If fees have already been paid, the full amount should be refunded in a timely way.</p> <p>Alternatively, services can invite parents/carers who have already paid fees to voluntarily and explicitly agree that some or all of fees paid are retained as a donation to the service. This should be agreed in writing by parents/carers. Participating services will still be allowed to undertake voluntary fundraising activities.</p>
<p>Can a sessional service charge for program hours over and above the 15 hours per week?</p>	<p>Sessional services that accept the Free Kinder funding can charge parents for any kindergarten program hours over and above the 15 funded hours per week (600 hours per year) and / or 'wrap around' care. Where a program operates for more than 15 hours per week, services should determine the hourly program rate based on the scheduled 2021 fee (including the costs of regular incursions and excursions) and can charge parents that rate for the hours above the 15 funded hours. If your service conducts occasional special events (e.g. once a term excursions) that are outside the 15 hour a week program, you can charge for the costs of these in full.</p>

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Question	Answer
Sessional kindergarten programs	Optional wrap around sessions outside the 15 hours can be charged at the service's discretion.
Why are LDCs allowed to offset fees while sessional kindergartens cannot?	<p>The \$2,122 subsidy for sessional kindergarten services is intended to fully offset the parent fee component of a funded kindergarten program.</p> <p>The Victorian Government wants to provide as many families as possible with access to a free kindergarten program, so for sessional services that accept the Free Kinder funding it is a requirement that the 15 hour program is free. The Free Kinder subsidy for sessional services has been set at a rate that is higher than the parent fee amount for the vast majority of Victorian sessional kindergarten services to help enable this.</p> <p>Where families access kindergarten in an integrated long day care setting, the cost of the 15 hour kindergarten program forms part of the overall cost of education and care across the week. Unlike sessional kindergarten there is not a set fee, with the cost to families varying significantly depending on the level of Commonwealth Child Care Subsidy rebate that applies, and the number of days attended. The \$2,000 Free Kinder payment is intended to improve affordability for all families who are receiving a subsidised kindergarten program at their long day care, whatever their out of pocket costs are.</p>

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Question	Answer
Long day care services	
How does this impact on Commonwealth childcare subsidy payments?	<p>The Victorian Government is working with the Commonwealth Government to ensure that families receiving their funded kindergarten in long day care get the full benefit from this Free Kinder initiative. The Victorian Government policy is that the investment must be used to fully benefit families by delivering them \$2,000 off their yearly long day care fees. The Department of Education and Training will set up appropriate monitoring arrangements to ensure the full benefits are passed on to families.</p> <p>The Commonwealth Government will provide advice to long day services on the treatment of Free Kinder funding as soon as possible.</p>
How do long day care services apportion the \$2,000 to the kindergarten program?	<p>Long day care providers will be required to directly offset the full \$2,000 payment from parents' fees (the total bill), without calculating the cost of the kindergarten hours separately. Fee reductions should be made proportionally across the year to families' bills, i.e. fortnightly or monthly.</p>
How can you guarantee that the fee reductions will be passed on to families whose child is receiving funded kindergarten in long day care?	<p>Passing this saving on to Victorian families will be a contractual requirement of all participating early childhood education and care services, and we are confident that the sector will act in good faith.</p> <p>The Department of Education and Training will set up appropriate monitoring and auditing arrangements to ensure the full benefits go directly to families.</p>
What if a long day care doesn't have a kindergarten program?	<p>Only children receiving a funded kindergarten place at the service in question, led by a qualified teacher, are eligible under this initiative.</p> <p>We will work with long day care providers about applying to become a kindergarten provider, if they aren't already.</p>

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Question	Answer
Unfunded Three-Year-Old programs	
Who is eligible?	<p>Children attending unfunded three-year-old programs in sessional kindergarten services will directly benefit from reduced parent fees in participating services.</p> <p>For those families that have children attending unfunded three-year-old programs in sessional kindergarten services, there will also be reduced parent fees. Compulsory parent fees can be charged above this amount but must not exceed the gap between the payment made by the State and the fee for 2021.</p> <p>For example, if normal parent fees for the unfunded three-year old program are \$2,000 a year and the service receives the Free Kinder rate for unfunded three-year-old programs of \$1,600, the maximum compulsory out-of-pocket fees the service can charge is \$400.</p> <p>To receive this funding, sessional services will be required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • directly offset the full \$1,600 payment (which will be prorated for less than five hours) from parent fees • refund \$1,600 from any parent fees that have already been paid for 2021 (or a pro-rata amount if the parent has paid semesterly or termly) in a reasonable timeframe.
Will kindergarten providers receiving Commonwealth JobKeeper funding be eligible?	<p>Kindergarten providers that receive Commonwealth JobKeeper payments prior to their phasing out in March 2021 are eligible for Free Kinder payments in full for the whole year.</p>

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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Unfunded Three-Year-Old programs	
What is the financial benefit to families of this initiative? What are some examples?	<p>This initiative will mean a reduction in kinder fees of \$1,600 over the 2021 kinder year (based on a five hour or more program).</p> <p>For example, a family with a child enrolled in an unfunded three-year-old program for five hours a week in a participating kindergarten service (receiving the Free Kinder offer for the funded kindergarten program) that pay \$1,700 a year will only pay \$100 in fees in 2021.</p> <p>A family with a child enrolled in an unfunded three-year-old program for 2.5 hours a week in a participating kindergarten service that charges \$850 a year will receive a fee offset of \$800 (pro-rata for a 2.5 hour a week program), and therefore will only pay \$50 in fees in 2021.</p>
Will payments be made directly to families?	Payments will be made to participating service providers (not directly to families) to offset parent fees by \$1,600 .
What if a family has already paid a deposit or fees for 2021?	<p>If a service is participating in the Free Kinder initiative in 2021, any fee payments that have already been made must be returned to families in full within a reasonable timeframe.</p> <p>Alternatively, services can invite parents/carers who have already paid fees to voluntarily and explicitly agree that some or all of fees paid is retained as a donation to the service. This should be agreed in writing by parents/carers.</p> <p>Participating services will still be allowed to undertake voluntary fundraising activities.</p>
Can a service with funded kindergarten and unfunded 3YO choose certain parts from the Free Kinder package?	No. Funded sessional kindergarten services cannot “cherry pick” from within the Free Kinder initiative. Participating services that have a funded kindergarten program must take the Free Kinder offer if they wish to access the unfunded three-year-old kindergarten funding. Services that only offer unfunded three-year-old kindergarten can just take up this offer.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Question	Answer
Non-Government Schools	
<p>For independent schools that charge well above average fees, do they have to reduce the funding from the parent fee component?</p>	<p>Yes, Independent schools that accept the Free Kindergarten offer cannot charge parent fees for their sessional funded kindergarten program.</p> <p>Non-government schools receiving the Independent Schools Type 2 funding per capita rate are eligible for a 'top up' of \$1,779 to bring their funding up to the standard per capita amount (as well as the \$2,122 Free Kinder subsidy) if they accept the Free Kinder terms and conditions. This additional funding only applies in 2021 for the purpose of supporting these school-based services to offer a free program.</p>