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Best Start
Best Life



Kindergarten Sector Guide

Introduction

The new kindergarten year marks an exciting time for children and the early childhood education sector. Thousands of children will be starting Three- and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten, and a further 12 local government areas (LGAs) will start to deliver Pre-Prep, following a successful launch in 6 LGAs in 2025.

The Best Start, Best Life reforms are the most significant change to Victoria's early childhood sector in a generation. There will be many exciting milestones over the life of the reforms, including a growing workforce and record infrastructure investment.

With all that is happening, the Department of Education has developed this resource with key information about early childhood education in Victoria. This guide will be updated for the start of each year so you can stay up to date on the reforms.

How to use this guide

The guide is for service directors and managers, teachers and educators. It includes key information about the Best Start, Best Life reforms, and the support available for children to access and participate in kindergarten programs.

The content in this guide can be used on websites, social media and newsletters and to help respond to questions from staff and families.

For up-to-date information about the range of funding that is available, eligibility criteria and the obligations and accountability in receiving funding, refer to the **Kindergarten Funding Guide**.

Where we are now – 2026

- Free Kinder continues to be available
- Three-Year-Old Kindergarten continues to be delivered, with services offering programs between 5 and 15 hours
- Four-Year-Old Kindergarten is becoming Pre-Prep, with hours gradually increasing from 15 to 30 hours a week.
- A further 12 local government areas (LGAs) will start to deliver Pre-Prep, following a successful launch in 6 LGAs in 2025
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from a refugee or asylum seeker background, and children who have had contact with Child Protection services have statewide access to 16 to 25 hours per week of Pre-Prep

- This includes children who were supported by Early Start Kindergarten or Access to Early Learning in their Three-Year-Old Kindergarten year.
- 18 Victorian Government-owned early learning and childcare centres will provide over 1,800 licensed places for local children and families.
- Service providers that receive kindergarten funding will use Arrival for mandatory kindergarten data reporting. All sessional services will report attendance data to the Department of Education via the Arrival digital sign in and out functionality or through a third-party provider where the data will flow automatically into Arrival.

Resources

- vic.gov.au/communicating-about-kindergarten-to-your-community for resources about kindergarten, including Free Kinder, that can be shared with families
- vic.gov.au/kindergarten-sector-guide-video-resources for a collection of video resources that may also be of use when talking with families
- vic.gov.au/kinder/translations for information in 30 languages about kindergarten in Victoria
- vic.gov.au/arrival shares information and resources related to Arrival and the collection of attendance data from sessional services.




Photo: SmartOz Kids

The Best Start, Best Life reforms

Victoria is building on its nation-leading early childhood system by delivering:

- **Free Kinder:** Free Kinder is available for all 3- and 4-year-old children at participating Victorian services in standalone (sessional) kindergartens and long day care centres.
- **Three-Year-Old Kindergarten:** Three-Year-Old Kindergarten continues, with programs increasing to 15 hours a week across the state by 2029, providing Victorian children with 2 years of quality early learning before school.
- **Pre-Prep:** By 2036, 4-year-old children in all locations across Victoria will have access to between 16 and 30 hours of Pre-Prep.
- **Early learning and childcare centres:** 50 Victorian government-owned and operated early learning and childcare centres are being established. These centres will be built in areas with the greatest need and make it easier for families to access early childhood education and childcare.

Victoria's expansion of Four-Year-Old Kindergarten gives children more time with qualified early childhood teachers and educators, during a period of rapid brain development.

This increase in hours in the year before school gives children even greater access to the many benefits of early childhood education.

Teachers and educators can also provide deeper and more deliberate play experiences, which will give children opportunities to embed their learning.

Resources

- earlylearning.vic.gov.au for information about the government owned and operated early learning and childcare centres, including the 14 new centres for 2026
- vic.gov.au/best-start-best-life-reforms for information about the Best Start, Best Life initiatives and the roll-out schedule.

Free Kinder

A critical part of the Best Start, Best Life reforms is Free Kinder, which supports access to 2 years of quality kindergarten programs for Victorian children.

Free Kinder is available for funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, Four-Year-Old Kindergarten and Pre-Prep at participating services in standalone (sessional) services and long day care centres. In 2024, 97% of services offered Free Kinder.

Free Kinder is for everyone. Families don't need to be permanent residents or Australian citizens to access a free kindergarten program.

Let families know that participating services receive funding directly from the Victorian Government, so they won't have to claim the savings back.

Free Kinder at standalone (sessional) kindergartens

- Families with children enrolled in participating standalone (sessional) kindergarten services in 2026 receive a free program.
- For Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, this means a free program of between 5 and 15 hours per week.
- For Four-Year-Old Kindergarten, this means a free program of 15 hours per week.
- For Pre-Prep, this means a free program of between 16 and 30 hours per week.
- Where additional hours are offered over and above the free program, these hours are optional and will incur a fee.

Free Kinder at long day care centres

- Families with children enrolled in participating long day care centres in 2026 will receive a fee offset.
- The funding rates for Three- and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten and Pre-Prep can be found on the department website (see second listed webpage in the 'Resources' section).
- Most families will still pay some fees for their child's attendance across the week, depending on the number of days attended and their Commonwealth Child Care Subsidy entitlement.

Children who are eligible for Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) should still be enrolled in ESK, even where Free Kinder or 15 hours per week of funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten

is offered. Enrolling children through ESK ensures they have priority of access to kindergarten and also means services can receive additional funding and support.

It is important that families understand they can only access a funded kindergarten program and Free Kinder at one service at a time. Services are required to have a completed 'one funded place' form for all families. This form can be included with any enrolment materials provided to families.

Resources

- vic.gov.au/free-kinder for more information about Free Kinder
- vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-rates for information about Free Kinder funding rates
- vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide for information about kindergarten funding and policies
- vic.gov.au/communicating-about-kindergarten-to-your-community for information about Free Kinder that can be shared with families
- vic.gov.au/free-kinder-funding-requirements-sessional-services and vic.gov.au/free-kinder-funding-requirements-long-day-care-providers for specific information on funding requirements
- vic.gov.au/resources-funded-kindergartens for the 'one funded place' form.

Three-Year-Old Kindergarten

Tens of thousands of children are benefiting from the statewide implementation of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, which is now available in more than 3000 services across Victoria.

Services determine how many hours of funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten are delivered per week, with a minimum of 5 hours and a maximum of 15 hours, within set parameters. In 2024, more than 80% of services offered 15 hours per week.

The priority is to give as many Victorian children access to a funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten place as possible. Where places are limited, the participation of children is prioritised over the number of weekly program hours delivered.

Services will be funded pro-rata for the program hours delivered.

Services should not increase their Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program hours in 2026 if this lowers the number of 3- or 4-year-old places that were offered in 2025. The department's priority of access criteria will continue to apply to the allocation of funded kindergarten places to 3- and 4-year-old children. Where places are limited, access to a funded kindergarten program should be prioritised over the number of weekly program hours delivered.

Key milestones for Three-Year-Old Kindergarten

- **2020:** introduced in 6 regional local government areas (LGAs)
- **2021:** launched in a further 15 LGAs
- **2022:** available across Victoria
- **2023-2026:** services across Victoria are providing between 5 and 15 hours of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten each week.

From 2026, across Victoria, children who meet the eligibility requirements due to their learning or developmental needs can access an additional year of either Three-Year-Old Kindergarten or Four-Year-Old Kindergarten (or Pre-Prep for eligible children), but not both.

Kinder Kits

As part of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, all eligible children receive a free Kinder Kit. Everything inside a Kinder Kit has been recommended by education experts to help families make learning through play part of everyday life.

The specially designed Kinder Kits are filled with books by Australian authors and educational toys and activities, made especially for three-year-olds to enjoy at home.

Resources

- vic.gov.au/operational-policies-supporting-best-start-best-life-reforms for more information on flexible hours and other policies for funded kindergarten service providers
- vic.gov.au/additional-year-funded-four-year-old-kindergarten for more information about an additional year of kindergarten
- vic.gov.au/kinderkits for videos and resources about Kinder Kits. There is information about the authors and makers, and readings of Kinder Kit books with Auslan translations
- vic.gov.au/kinder/translations Each Kinder Kit includes a printed **Guide for Families**, with tips and ideas to help parents and carers guide their child's early learning and development at home. The Guide for Families is also available online in 31 languages.

What you need to know about Pre-Prep

From 2025, Four-Year-Old Kindergarten in Victoria began gradually transitioning to Pre-Prep. This means that hours will steadily increase from 15 hours to 30 hours per week. By 2036, all services will offer between 16 and 30 hours each week of kindergarten for 4-year-olds.

Led by qualified teachers, the increase in hours through Pre-Prep will give 4-year-old children more opportunities to socialise and learn through play.

A further 12 local government areas (LGAs) will deliver Pre-Prep in 2026, following a successful launch in 6 LGAs in 2025.

The staged schedule allows time to grow the necessary workforce and build the infrastructure required, and for services to prepare for expanded programs.

New LGAs will start to deliver Pre-Prep each year:

- From 2025 through to 2028, Pre-Prep will roll out in all Victorian regional LGAs (except Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong).
- From 2032, Pre-Prep will begin rolling out in Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong.
- From 2034, Pre-Prep will begin rolling out in Metropolitan Melbourne.

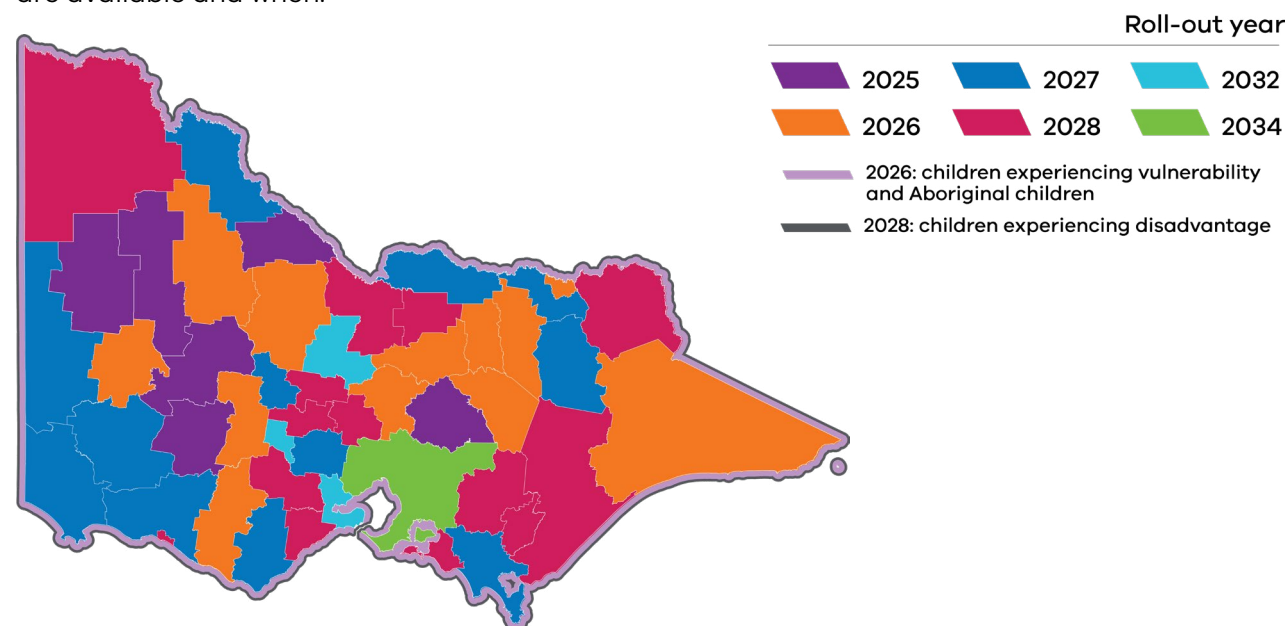
Pre-Prep will also be rolled out to the below priority groups across Victoria:

- From 2026, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from a refugee or asylum seeker background, and children who have had contact with Child Protection will have access to Pre-Prep. In addition, if a child is eligible for Early Start Kindergarten or enrolled in Access to Early Learning in 2025, they can start Pre-Prep in 2026.
- From 2028, children who have (or have a parent or guardian who has) a Commonwealth concession card, and children from a multiple birth (triplets or more) will have access to Pre-Prep.

See the roll-out map and the [full roll-out schedule](#), which also outlines how many hours are available and when.

Resources

- vic.gov.au/pre-prep for information about Pre-Prep and the roll-out schedule, as well as a calculator you can share with families which will allow them to check their child's eligibility for Pre-Prep.



Expanding your early childhood education programs

The scale of the Best Start, Best Life reforms means some degree of change at every service, whether your service is a large provider with multiple programs, or a small kindergarten with a parent-run committee of management.

The way your service approaches making changes to deliver more hours of kindergarten will depend on what is right for your service and community.

When you are considering how to increase your program hours, your **local Early Childhood Improvement Branch** can help you to explore:

- changes to your program modelling, such as through multi-age or rotational groups
- grants, supports and initiatives available for new and expanded facilities, and to improve existing facilities.

This advice will be tailored to the characteristics of your service, and your unique circumstances.

Your local Early Childhood Improvement Branch can also talk to you about the initiatives in place to support services to attract and retain workforce, including:

- Best Start, Best Life communications collateral to encourage people from all backgrounds to choose careers in early childhood education

- scholarships, Free TAFE and flexible and supported study pathways (including traineeships and other employment based options) for new students wanting to become teachers or educators as well as for existing educators looking to upskill
- financial incentives available for early childhood teachers and educators to join or re-join the Victorian kindergarten sector. Relocation support may also be available, including for those moving with families
- recruitment supports to help services and providers find early childhood professionals seeking a new role or a move to Victoria
- induction, coaching and mentoring supports for early career teachers and educators, to enhance the transition from study to practice
- professional development and career supports, including coaching, Early Years Learning Networks, and programs to enhance leadership and career development
- guides to careers in early childhood education are also available to support secondary school students to explore the range of study and career pathways available, and services may find them helpful to support discussions with other interested members of the community.

Resources

- vic.gov.au/delivering-pre-prep-children-priority-cohorts for information about what to consider with program models at your service to maximise outcomes for children
- vic.gov.au/shaping-the-best-start-best-life-reforms to see the infrastructure and workforce strategies
- schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/early-childhood-grants for information about Building Blocks and other early childhood infrastructure grants
- vic.gov.au/early-childhood-professional for information about job opportunities and support available for anyone interested in a career in early childhood education
- vic.gov.au/guide-careers-early-childhood-education for more information on study and career pathways in early childhood education

The benefits of 2 years of quality early childhood education

Australian and international evidence shows that quality play-based learning helps set children up for success in education and life.

By 2036, all children across Victoria will be able to access up to 1,800 hours of funded kindergarten before school, including 600 hours of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten and up to 1,200 hours of Pre-Prep.

Two years of quality early childhood education has more impact than one year and can lift children's outcomes across all learning domains.

Studies show children who attend kindergarten for 2 years have better development in language, pre-reading, early number concepts, independence, concentration, and social skills when starting school.

The first 5 years of life are a period of rapid brain development — by the time a child turns 5, around 90% of their brain development has occurred.

Two years of quality early learning programs have a particularly strong impact on children who need extra support.

Resources

- vic.gov.au/evidence-behind-2-years-kindergarten for information about the evidence behind the reforms.

Why play-based learning?

As an early childhood professional, you see how powerful play-based learning can be for young children as they explore, experiment, question and discover new concepts.

Play-based learning is now widely understood to be one of the most important ways to support children to develop the skills they need to live well now and into the future.

You may want to explain to families what play-based learning is, and that through purposeful play, children can engage with the people, places and objects around them to build an understanding of themselves and their world. Let parents and carers know that positive attitudes towards learning, such as persistence, curiosity, and imagination, are all developed during play, and it can set children up for a life-long love of learning.

As Victorian kindergarten programs will continue to be play-based when Pre-Prep is introduced, the increase in hours will provide opportunities to create deeper and more deliberate play experiences. It may be helpful to let families know this will often include a combination of physical play, dramatic play, sensory play, nature/outdoor play and creative play.

Resources

- vic.gov.au/best-start-best-life-transforming-early-childhood-education-together/why-play-based-learning for information about what play-based learning is and its benefits
- vic.gov.au/communicating-about-kindergarten-to-your-community which contains the 'Play-based learning and your child' factsheet with families listed under 'Infographics and fact sheets'.

Child safety

All children have the right to learn and play in nurturing, secure and safe environments. Supporting this right is a fundamental obligation of all Victorian early childhood education and care services.

The following information may help you to have conversations with families about your service's commitment to child safety and safety measures in place at your service.

Child safety reforms

In 2025, the Victorian Government introduced child safety measures in early childhood education and care settings, including creating a register of early childhood workers and restricting the use of personal electronic devices.

The government also commissioned the Rapid Child Safety Review to identify actions to further strengthen the safety of children in Victorian early childhood education and care settings.

The government has accepted and is implementing all proposed reforms. This includes:

- establishing an independent and strengthened Early Childhood Education and Care Regulator to ensure that early childhood services provide high quality and safe early childhood education and care to Victorian children

- bringing the Working with Children Check (WWCC), Reportable Conduct Scheme and Child Safe Standards into the Social Services Regulator (SSR) so individual workers can be detected more quickly and prevented from working with children again
- working with experts to provide parents and carers with evidence-based advice and resources on prevention awareness, signs of grooming and how to raise concerns

Resources

- [Rapid Child Safety Review | vic.gov.au](https://www.vic.gov.au/rapid-child-safety-review)

Child Safe Standards

All services are required to comply with the Child Safe Standards. To create and maintain a child safe organisation, services need to consider how they promote and model child safety and put in place systems and processes to keep children safe.

The standards include clear, practical guidance to services on how to create organisational cultures and use practices that are in the best interests of children and protect them from harm.

The standards also outline how you can demonstrate to families and the community that your service prioritises children's safety, including by:

- consulting with families on your child safety policies, and regularly seeking formal and informal feedback on how these are working
- making sure policies are written in clear, easy-to-follow language, and translated where appropriate
- displaying your child safety policies in a prominent area, as well as publishing them on your website
- making it clear how parents/carers can raise concerns, including nominating a dedicated person or child safety officer
- include regular updates on child safety issues in parent communications
- schedule child safety briefings as part of information sessions

- include a child safety agenda item at all parent/carer meetings
- proactively share information about staff qualifications and ratios.

Resources

Early childhood services - guidance
| [vic.gov.au](https://www.vic.gov.au)

Child Information Sharing Scheme

The Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) enables services to appropriately share information to support child wellbeing or safety. Authorised organisations and professionals can either request information or decide to share it with other authorised professionals. This includes education professionals, such as teachers, day care and kindergarten workers. Information can only be shared when it will assist in providing services, making plans, or investigating or managing risks to children.

Resources

Child Information Sharing | [vic.gov.au](https://www.vic.gov.au)

The Teaching Excellence Approach

Supporting high-quality teaching is a key aspect of the Best Start, Best Life reforms and is the focus of the department's new Teaching Excellence Approach. Teaching Excellence is a comprehensive approach to supporting teaching quality in Kindergarten and Pre-Prep through the development of skills and knowledge in sector staff from Victorian funded Kindergartens.

Teaching Excellence is supported by a new **Early Childhood Hub** (the Hub), a highly interactive professional learning platform that allows early childhood teachers, educators and educational and service leaders to access high-quality, on-demand and tailored supports to meet their specific learning needs. The Hub has a range of on-demand self-paced eLearning opportunities and will also deliver coaching and mentoring programs. The Hub was launched in August 2025 and will continue to expand over the coming years.

The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF)

The **Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF)** includes a range of discipline-specific guidelines and practice resources. It supports all professionals who work with children aged 0 to 8.

Victorian Kindergarten Learning Progressions

The **Learning Progressions** describe how children typically develop over time across eight key learning domains. They're not checklists or tick-box assessments. Instead, they:

- reflect a developmental continuum, showing a range of capabilities from emerging to more advanced
- align closely with the VEYLDF Outcomes
- help educators notice and describe learning with shared, profession-informed language
- support intentional teaching, formative assessment, and transitions.

Importantly, the progressions were designed to be used in everyday practice: to guide your thinking, shape planning conversations, and deepen your documentation.

To help educators connect the learning progressions to the VEYLDF, clear mapping has been established across each of the eight learning domains. These show how the progressions enhance and extend the VEYLDF Outcomes by offering more granular, observable indicators of development.

For details, please refer to page 8 of the **Victoria Learning Progressions Brochure**.

A professional learning module on the learning progressions has been made available on the **Early Childhood Hub**.

Supporting families with enrolment and attendance

Supporting Victorian 3- and 4-year-old children to enrol in and experience the benefits of a quality, play-based kindergarten program continues to be a priority.

The following information may be helpful when talking to families about when and how to enrol in kindergarten programs. The enrolment may be directly through the service or the Central Registration and Enrolment Scheme (CRES) provider. It may also be helpful to support families' engagement and attendance at kindergarten.

When to start kindergarten

Children can attend kindergarten programs in the 2 years before they start school.

Families with children born between January and April can choose which year to start Three-Year-Old Kindergarten. These children can start in the same year they turn 3, or in the year they turn 4.

Some families may not realise that enrolment for Three-Year-Old Kindergarten occurs the year before, in many cases when their child is 2.

When discussing the best time for children to start kinder, encourage parents and carers to plan ahead, consider the age they would like their child to start school and seek further advice from early childhood professionals if required.

Resources

- vic.gov.au/when-start-kindergarten for information about when children can start kindergarten. Show parents and carers the 'Starting age calculator' listed under 'Starting kindergarten'.
- vic.gov.au/sending-child-kinder for information about the benefits of kindergarten and how to find a program.

Supporting families to enrol

Some kindergarten services are part of a Central Registration and Enrolment Scheme (CRES), which is usually delivered by the local council.

CRES provides a single point of contact for families to apply for multiple kindergarten services in their area and helps support children to secure a place that best suits their needs.

If your service participates in a CRES, share the following information with families:

- how to register for kindergarten via CRES and the supports available
- registration for kindergarten usually happens in March to May, but families can register for kindergarten at any time of year
- families will receive updates by email or text message when their child is offered a kindergarten place, often in early August (your CRES provider will confirm their timelines). The CRES team will advise about the timelines for responding to the offer

- families can choose to reject the offer they receive and ask for another offer in the next round. Second round offers often come out in early September
- once a family accepts a kindergarten place for their child, the kindergarten service will help with the enrolment process and prepare them for day one.

If your service does not participate in a CRES, consider sharing with families how to enrol at your service, and key dates for enrolment.

It may be useful for families to know that they can seek help with kindergarten registration and enrolment from their local CRES provider (or kindergarten service, as applicable), Maternal and Child Health nurse and other support services that the family is connected in with.

Some families, including families from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, may experience barriers to enrolling in kindergarten. The 'Engaging with culturally and linguistically diverse families' chapter of this guide highlights resources available to support families from CALD backgrounds to enrol and participate in kindergarten.

Funded kindergartens and eligible early years support services, including CRES providers, can use an interpreter to support parents and carers who speak a language other than English or use Auslan to register and enrol in kindergarten. An interpreter can support families to understand the requirements and policies of your service (for example, in relation to starting age, proof of address, and

Photo: Tyabb Preschool



immunisation) and can assist with completing enrolment forms. Using an interpreter can help build trust, support families to feel included and encourage participation in your service.

Kindergartens can also access written document translations to support families who speak a language other than English to register and enrol in kindergarten. Early Childhood Language Services are funded by the Department of Education to support with this at no cost to funded services (see the link below for more detail).

Resources

- vic.gov.au/kindergarten-central-registration-and-enrolment for best practice guides and a list of councils with a CRES
- vic.gov.au/use-interpreter-early-childhood-education-services for information about accessing free telephone, video and on-site interpreters, and free written documentation translation
- vic.gov.au/how-enrol-kindergarten for information for families about how to enrol, including documents needed and information on the 'No Jab, No Play' policy
- findakinder.vic.gov.au for the 'Find a Kindergarten Program' interactive map.

Promoting enrolments

The department has communication materials available to support services to promote enrolments. These include social media tiles, posters, postcards, infographics and factsheets, and translated materials.

When promoting enrolments, you may share key information about the importance and benefits of kindergarten and let families know Free Kinder is available.

Include information about your Three- and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten, and Pre-Prep program hours and timetable and promote any open days.

Resources

- For resources to promote your kindergarten programs and enrolments, please visit vic.gov.au/communicating-about-kindergarten-to-your-community
- For information to support you in your discussions with families about Pre-Prep, please visit vic.gov.au/conversations-families-about-pre-prep
- To order printed materials for your service from the Victorian Kindergarten Resource Portal, free of charge and delivered to your service, please visit shout.finsbury.com.au/kinder/en-AU/.

Promoting engagement and attendance

While kindergarten attendance is non-compulsory, regular kindergarten attendance gives children more opportunities to access the many benefits of quality kindergarten. Children who have consistent attendance patterns in kindergarten are also more likely to maintain their level of participation once they commence school.

Services should continue to engage with children and families in a way that is non-judgemental, strengths-based and meets families where they are at. It is important that families do not feel that their attendance and reasons for absence are being monitored. Services should also avoid actions that may lead to families feeling pressured, targeted or marginalised as a result of the level of their child's kindergarten attendance. This means fostering open communication, building trust and providing culturally sensitive support that acknowledges individual circumstances and needs.

Enrolment and orientation are good opportunities to connect and understand the cultural values, expectations and experiences of each family. These key early interactions lay the foundations for a collaborative relationship with parents and carers and will help them feel like they belong at kindergarten, that they are listened to, and will receive the information and support they need.

To support families and children experiencing vulnerability in establishing consistent attendance, services should work to understand the barriers they face to attending and ensure:

- ongoing kindergarten engagement that is responsive to a family/carer and child's circumstances
- educators are equipped to deliver a program that is inclusive of the individual context, abilities and needs of all children, including employing trauma-informed practice where appropriate
- every child experiences success in their learning and development.

Where a child's attendance has been reduced, strengths-based and culturally safe goals should be developed to support increased attendance, aligned with the child's Individual Learning Plan and responsive to their developmental and wellbeing needs.

Beginning in 2025, kindergartens must report attendance data to the Victorian Department of Education via **Arrival**. The department will use this information to support kindergarten attendance as part of the **Preschool Reform Agreement**, so that all Victorian children receive the full learning and development benefits of a quality early childhood education.

Long day care services that already provide attendance data to the Australian Government via the Child Care Subsidy System (CCSS), are not required to provide attendance data through Arrival.

Kindergarten funding is not tied to the collection and reporting of attendance information.

Resources

- vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide to access the Kindergarten Funding Guide. The Managing engagement with families chapter (page 24-25) may support you to promote engagement and attendance.
- vic.gov.au/expanding-your-early-childhood-education-programs-change-management-toolkit to access Expanding your early childhood education programs – Change management toolkit, which includes information that can support understanding the importance of attendance, as well as additional hours.
- vic.gov.au/arrival-attendance-data-collection for information and resources services can use to support families and carers with the transition to digital sign in and sign out in Arrival.

Supporting all Victorian children to participate in kindergarten programs

Quality early childhood education is an opportunity to help children develop the skills they need to thrive at school and throughout their life.

There are a range of supports for funded kindergartens to enable Victorian children from all backgrounds to access and participate in kindergarten programs. These supports may be particularly useful when engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from a refugee or asylum seeker background, and children who have had contact with Child Protection, who will have statewide access to Pre-Prep from 2026.

School Readiness Funding

School Readiness Funding (SRF) funds a range of programs and supports that aim to address educational disadvantage through building the capacity of educators and families to respond to children's learning and development needs. SRF supports all funded early childhood education services.

Services can choose from a menu of evidence-informed programs and supports (the Menu), and access allied health supports relating to three priority outcome areas: Communication (language, literacy and numeracy), Wellbeing (social, emotional and executive function) and Access, Inclusion and Participation.

The amount of SRF that services receive is based on the level of need of children enrolled – this is informed by parental occupation and education data, which is why it is important for services to accurately collect this information during enrolment.

In 2025, School Readiness Funding moved from an annual plan to a 2-year planning cycle. This will benefit services by providing greater predictability to be able to plan over a longer time, reducing the administrative requirements associated with the planning and implementation processes and ensuring timely intervention and support is provided. Early Childhood Improvements Branches work with services to develop a two-year School Readiness Funding Plan.

Resources

- vic.gov.au/school-readiness-funding for information about how funding is allocated and what it can be used for.

Koorie Kids Shine

Koorie Kids Shine promotes the benefits of kindergarten to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and the community. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 3 can access 15 hours of free kindergarten each week through Early Start Kindergarten and 4-year-olds can access up to 25 hours of Pre-Prep.

Koorie Kids Shine also provides information and imagery to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, and has content, including videos, for families and educators.

Contact your local Early Childhood Improvement Branch or Koorie Education Coordinator to support cultural inclusion at your service.

Resources

- vic.gov.au/koorie-education-coordinator-contact-details to contact a Koorie Education Coordinator to support cultural inclusion at your service.
- vic.gov.au/early-childhood-education-programs-supporting-aboriginal-children for Koorie Kids Shine communication materials (that can be printed or ordered free of charge) and information about Balert Gerrbik: Koorie Families as First Educators and the bupup balak wayipungang initiatives
- vic.gov.au/koorie-kids-shine for information and videos about the benefits of kindergarten for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and cultural safety at kindergarten.

Early Years Engagement Program

The Early Years Engagement Program (EYEP) focuses on building the capability of Early Childhood service leaders and practitioners to better incorporate First Nations perspectives into their service design, delivery and practice.

The program is managed by the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) and focuses on reaching Early Childhood service leaders, teachers, and educators that are not connected with other cultural development activities.

There are 8 place-based Early Years Engagement Facilitators across Victoria who assist services in taking the next steps in their journey of embedding First Nations perspectives. This may include assisting services to connect to local Aboriginal community.

Engaging with culturally and linguistically diverse families

There are a range of programs funded by the Department of Education available to support families from CALD backgrounds to access and participate in kindergarten.

These include:

- The CALD Outreach Initiative – supports the inclusion of children from CALD backgrounds in kindergarten and Pre-Prep through CALD Outreach Worker positions at 26 local councils. CALD Outreach Workers provide direct support to families as well as early childhood education and care services to address engagement barriers and support transitions to school and ongoing participation in education.
- The Foundation House Early Years Program – supports early childhood services in their work with children and families from refugee backgrounds through providing resources, professional learning, consultancy and place-based programs including Communities of Practice (CoPs).
- Fka Children's Services (fkaCS) Cultural Inclusion Support – provides advice, referral and support to kindergarten services, to identify and address barriers to the inclusion of multilingual children.

All department funded kindergarten services can also access free on-site, telephone and video interpreters and free written document translations

Parents and carers can access free in-bound telephone interpreting service to initiate contact with a kindergarten or early childhood support service using a telephone interpreter in a preferred language.

Resources

- vic.gov.au/supporting-cald-families-engage-kindergarten for resources and programs to support communication with CALD families about kindergarten and its benefits, including in-language videos.
- vic.gov.au/use-interpreter-early-childhood-education-services for information about accessing free telephone, video and on-site interpreters, free written document translations user guides and Foundation House Tip sheets.
- sifr.foundationhouse.org.au/early-years/ for information about the Foundation House Early Years Program, including the CoPs, resources, videos and case studies on supporting children and families from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds to participate in early childhood education.
- vic.gov.au/fka-childrens-services-cultural-inclusion-support-packages for information on fka Children's Services Cultural inclusion support
- vic.gov.au/kinder/translations for translated information about Free Kinder, the benefits of 2 years of kindergarten, how to enrol and more – available in 30 languages.

Early Start Kindergarten

Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) provides eligible children with 15 hours of free or low-cost kindergarten each week led by a qualified teacher.

To be eligible for ESK, children must:

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

Eligible children should be enrolled in ESK, even where Free Kinder or 15 hours per week of funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten is offered.

As these children will then be eligible for Pre-Prep in 2026, ESK enrolments in 2025 may give your service an indication of how many children will be enrolling in Pre-Prep the following year.

Enrolling children through ESK means they have priority of access and can enrol without up-to-date immunisation information (while they undertake catch-up immunisations) under No Jab, No Play legislation.

Early childhood services may receive additional supports and can maximise available funding to support kindergarten placements for ESK enrolments.

Resources

- vic.gov.au/early-start-kindergarten-information-professionals for information about ESK eligibility criteria, referral process and funding
- health.vic.gov.au/immunisation/no-jab-no-play for more information about immunisation requirements for children enrolled in ESK
- vic.gov.au/early-start-kindergarten for information about ESK for families – translated brochures are available.

LOOKOUT

LOOKOUT Education Support Centres strengthen the capability of early childhood services, schools, carers, child protection practitioners, and out-of-home care services to improve educational outcomes for children and young people living in out-of-home care.

LOOKOUT Education Support Centres are staffed by multidisciplinary teams, including Early Childhood Learning Advisors, and operate in each of the department's 4 regions.

Early Childhood Learning Advisors promote and support:

- Early Start Kindergarten
- enrolment and ongoing engagement in quality early childhood education and care settings
- the transition to school process

- inclusive, culturally safe and trauma-informed practice in early childhood education and care settings.

For advice, services should contact the Early Childhood Learning Advisor at their regional LOOKOUT Centre.

Resources

- vic.gov.au/lookout-education-support-centres for more information about the support available, and area contact details.

Flexible Support Packages

Flexible Support Packages (FSPs) provide short-term assistance (up to 10 weeks) for children who:

- have a background of trauma and adversity in the early years
- consistently demonstrate behaviours of concern
- require immediate additional support to stabilise their attendance and inclusion in the kindergarten program.

FSPs are available state-wide. With an FSP, services are able to purchase additional short-term supports that enhance the child's safety and engagement in the kindergarten program, through building the service's capacity, to:

- support and address the child's concerning behaviours

Photo: Tyabb Preschool



- regulate attention, emotions and behaviour during attendance
- support the child to develop skills that effectively and positively manage interactions with other children and adults/educators.

Resources

- vic.gov.au/flexible-support-packages-funded-kindergarten for more information about FSPs, including how to access an FSP, and types of supports available through an FSP.

Access to Early Learning

Access to Early Learning (AEL) is an early intervention program for 3-year-old children from families with complex needs. It supports these children and families to get the full benefits of attending a quality kindergarten program.

Trained facilitators work with families and services for the full calendar year, using a child-focused and strengths-based approach. Facilitators assist families to support their child to regularly attend kindergarten. They also visit families at home to help parents and carers with activities to build on what their child is learning at kindergarten.

AEL facilitators will work with kindergartens to ensure the child is supported at the service, and professional learning is also available for teachers who support AEL enrolments.

Children are eligible for AEL if they or their families have 2 or more complex needs, including:

- have had contact with Child Protection
- child and/or parent with intellectual or physical disability
- family violence
- mental health concerns
- sexual assault
- alcohol and drug abuse.

AEL is currently available across 25 Local Government Areas (LGAs). For more information about how to refer to the AEL program, services should contact their local AEL provider (see link below).

All AEL enrolments are eligible and should be supported to transition to Pre-Prep in the following year.

Resources

- vic.gov.au/access-early-learning for more information about how AEL works (including guidelines and a list of local providers) and its benefits, and details for the 23 sites across Victoria.

Supporting children with additional needs

Inclusion is an important part of the Best Start, Best Life reforms. Use the resources below to support the inclusion of all children at your service.

Kindergarten Inclusion Support Program

The Kindergarten Inclusion Support Program (KIS) enhances a kindergarten's capacity to respond to the individual abilities, interests and needs of children with a disability, developmental delay, high support needs or complex medical needs.

Support can include:

- specialist consultancy
- specialist training for staff
- minor building modifications
- additional staffing support.

Resources

- vic.gov.au/kindergarten-inclusion-children-disabilities for information about the types of KIS supports and who to contact.

Kindergarten Inclusion Support - Specialised Equipment Program

Specialised equipment is available through Kindergarten Inclusion Support (KIS) Specialised Equipment Program (SEP) for loan, and at no cost, to Victorian Government funded kindergarten programs to support children with significant disabilities to participate in kindergarten.

Resources

- vic.gov.au/kindergarten-inclusion-support-kis-program-specialised-equipment-trial-set for more information on the program, including eligibility, and how to apply.

Preschool Field Officer program

The Preschool Field Officer program is designed to provide practical advice and support to early childhood teachers in funded kindergarten services for children with additional needs.

Support can include:

- providing information, resources and program strategies
- coaching for teachers, including modelling specific strategies
- identification of referral pathways.

Preschool Field Officers do not deliver direct interventions with children, but rather support, guide and coach early childhood teachers to provide high-quality programs that support the inclusion of children with additional needs.

Resources

- vic.gov.au/preschool-field-officer-program for more information about the work Preschool Field Officers do (including guidelines and a factsheet) and a list of regional contacts.



Photo: Kinglake EC

Where to get more help

For more information, contact your local Department of Education **Early Childhood Improvement Branch (ECIB)**, which can provide tailored support. Their specialist staff work with early childhood staff, services and providers. They offer advice and resources to help services with the implementation of the Best Start, Best Life reforms.

The department also holds meetings and events that can help you and your team:

- **Early Learning Leadership Forums** – held in each of the 17 department areas twice a year, these forums provide a valuable opportunity for service and organisational leaders to connect locally
- **Best Start, Best Life Evening Leadership Series** – statewide hybrid events held twice each year to keep the sector informed on the reforms
- **Early Years Learning Networks** – over 60 local networks meet once each term, where teachers share learning, build collaborative connection, drive continuous quality improvement and embed the reforms in their practice.

You may also consider contacting the following early childhood education peak body that best represents you and your service for additional assistance. These peak bodies are funded by the Department of Education to provide support to both members and non-members to implement the Best Start, Best Life (BSBL) reforms.

Australian Childcare Alliance, Victoria

The Australian Childcare Alliance Victoria (ACAV) is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to championing the needs of privately owned long day care services.

ACAV offers practical, hands-on support across a wide range of areas critical to the effective running of early learning services, including:

- compliance and day-to-day operations
- employee and industrial relations, including award interpretation, entitlements and performance matters
- workforce planning and strategy
- sector reform, policy changes and regulatory developments.

Services can get in touch with ACAV through their **Contact** page.

Early Learning Association Australia

Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA) is the peak body representing and supporting community-operated, not-for-profit early childhood education and care providers.

ELAA provides support in areas such as:

- implementation of the Best Start, Best Life reforms
- governance (clarification of obligations as a committee, constitutional changes, decision making)
- HR management (general HR advice, including in relation to the contents of the Employee Management and Development resource)



Photo: Leongatha Children Centre

- management of complaints, and the addressing of community/committee conflict
- financial management (planning, budgeting, reporting)
- business management (sustainable programs, efficient business models and practices).

Members can also receive additional tailored support for IR issues and payroll

Services can get in touch with ELAA through their **Contact** page.

Municipal Association of Victoria

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) is a membership association and the legislated peak body for local government in Victoria. MAV provides their local council members a network of advisory committees that meet every quarter, and provides members with information and advice about the Best Start, Best Life reforms.

The Department of Education also partner with MAV on other funded supports including the **Central Registration and Enrolment Scheme (CRES)** and the **Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)** Kindergarten Participation Project.

Councils can get in touch with MAV through their **Contact** page.

Victorian Aboriginal Education Association

The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation who advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities in education matters.

For tailored BSBL implementation advice and support, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations can get in touch with VAEAI through their **Contact** page.

Resources

- vic.gov.au/leading-impact-events-early-childhood-leaders for upcoming dates of Early Learning Leadership Forums and the Best Start, Best Life Evening Leadership Series
- vic.gov.au/early-years-learning-networks-early-childhood-teachers for more information around the Early Years Learning Networks and how to get involved.

Your feedback is important

This guide will be regularly updated as the Best Start, Best Life reforms progress. The department welcomes your feedback on this resource.

bsbl.change.management@education.vic.gov.au

Best Start Best Life

vic.gov.au/kinder



Department
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