

# Three-Year-Old Kindergarten and Pre-Prep operational policy settings: Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

## Introduction

Under the [Best Start, Best Life reforms](#), new [operational policy settings](#) will apply to all funded kindergarten services in Victoria from 2026 to support the roll-out of Pre-Prep and Three-Year-Old Kindergarten. FAQs about these settings are outlined below.

For further information, including advice regarding the operational policy settings and support with local planning and programming options, please contact your [local Early Childhood Improvement Branch](#) (ECIB).

The Pre-Prep roll-out schedule can be found at: [Four-Year-Old Kindergarten is becoming Pre-Prep | vic.gov.au](#).

## Pre-Prep program hours

### Do kindergarten services have to deliver at least 16 hours per week of Pre-Prep to receive funding?

Yes, **in Pre-Prep roll-out areas**. From 2026, service providers receiving kindergarten funding from the department for services in Pre-Prep roll-out areas must deliver a program that meets all kindergarten funding requirements for at least 16 hours per week for 40 weeks of the year (or 640 hours per year).

**All funded kindergarten services in Victoria** must deliver at least 16 hours per week for 40 weeks of the year (or 640 hours per year) to children from priority cohorts. In 2026, these children are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- children from a refugee or asylum seeker background
- children who have had contact with Child Protection
- children who were supported by the Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) or Access to Early Learning (AEL) programs in their Three-Year-Old Kindergarten year.

If your service is experiencing exceptional circumstances that mean you are not able to deliver the minimum number of hours of Pre-Prep to eligible children, contact your local [ECIB](#) as soon as possible. These specialist staff can provide funding advice and offer a range of tailored supports to suit your unique circumstances, including advice on adapting program models to accommodate Pre-Prep.

### Can my long day care centre deliver a lower number of Pre-Prep hours per week over more weeks of the year?

Yes. Consistent with the current approach to funded kindergarten, services can elect to deliver Pre-Prep programs across more than 40 weeks each year, which may mean they deliver a lower hour-per-week program than specified in the roll-out schedule.

For example, the minimum number of hours for a Pre-Prep program is 640 hours per year. This

equates to 16 hours per week across 40 weeks of the year. A service delivering 14 hours per week of Pre-Prep for 48 weeks equates to 672 hours across the year, which would meet the minimum number of hours requirement.

A service choosing to extend the overall length of its program would need to be compliant with relevant industrial arrangements and regulatory requirements. Changes to staffing arrangements may also require staff consultation under the relevant industrial instrument (e.g. the enterprise agreement or award covering your service). Services seeking to understand applicable industrial arrangements may wish to contact their relevant early childhood education peak body or industrial representative for advice.

### **Will the maximum daily number of funded kindergarten program hours be increased with the roll-out of Pre-Prep?**

No. The current maximum number of funded kindergarten program hours of 8 hours per day will continue to apply.

This provision is to maximise participation in a teacher delivered kindergarten program. Funded kindergarten program hours in long day care centres should be delivered during the 'core' hours of the day, that is, when all children are present rather than at the beginning and end of the day when children are arriving and departing.

### **Can my sessional kindergarten service deliver Pre-Prep programs of different lengths (for example, one group attending 16 hours per week and one group attending 20 hours)?**

Yes, provided program hours are between 16 hours and the maximum permitted under the roll-out schedule. Pre-Prep programs should reflect the needs of the community and support eligible children to access a funded kindergarten place.

### **Can families enrol in or attend fewer hours than the program my service is offering?**

For **sessional services**, families enrol their child in the full program offered by a particular group at the service. Consistent with the current approach to flexible funding for Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, children will be funded for Pre-Prep based on the hours of the Pre-Prep program they are enrolled in.

Services should encourage families to attend the full program delivered by their service. The [Change Management Toolkit](#) and the ['Communicating about kindergarten to your community'](#) webpage include useful tips and strategies to support these discussions with families. Where families continue to prefer a 15-hour program, services should contact their [ECIB](#) to seek further advice.

In **long day care centres** delivering an integrated Pre-Prep program, a child must be enrolled in at least the minimum number of days required to receive 16 hours of Pre-Prep per week (or a minimum of 640 hours across the year) to be eligible for kindergarten funding. For example, if a service delivers 8 hours of Pre-Prep each day, a child must be enrolled in at least 2 days per week to be eligible for funding (16 hours per week). If the long day care centre delivers 6 hours of Pre-Prep each day, the child must be enrolled in at least 3 days per week to receive funding (18 hours per week).

Long day care centres should consider offering families different session options to reduce the fee burden and ensure Pre-Prep programs are accessible, particularly for children from priority cohorts. For example, long day care centres may consider providing 5- or 7.5-hour sessions, rather than requiring the purchase of a full day of care.

If a family declines the additional hours offered through Pre-Prep after services have talked with the family about the benefits of Pre-Prep and their eligibility, services should ensure the children can still access a 15-hour per week program. If the family changes their mind and would like to access Pre-Prep or a child is found to be eligible for Pre-Prep after enrolment, services should utilise any

available places or Pre-Purchased Places at their service to support their access through standard priority of access policies.

### **Can my sessional kindergarten service offer extra program hours at a cost to families?**

Services that have opted into Free Kinder must comply with all funding requirements applying to the service. For Pre-Prep, sessional services must not charge families fees for program hours up to the maximum number of hours children are eligible for under the roll-out schedule.

For example, a sessional service in a 2026 roll-out local government area (LGA) must deliver a Pre-Prep program of between 16 to 20 hours per week to children from the roll-out LGA, and between 16 to 25 hours per week for eligible children from a priority cohort to be funded. Any extra hours beyond the maximum Pre-Prep hours must be optional and will not be funded. For services in non-geographic roll-out areas, families will be funded for the 15-hour Four-Year-Old Kindergarten program, and eligible children from a priority cohort will be funded for between 16 to 25 hours.

In addition:

- services should communicate to families that any additional hours above the funded maximum are optional and may come at a cost
- any additional hours should be allocated to children from a priority cohort before being made available to families who choose to pay for additional hours
- families who opt to pay for additional hours should not be prioritised over families eligible for Pre-Prep, and who meet the Priority of Access criteria
- where there is limited capacity, priority should be given to families accessing a funded kindergarten place.

Some sessional services may offer 'wrap-around care'. This is optional extra care hours and not part of the funded kindergarten program.

The fees for these extra hours can be set by the service, in consultation with their community.

## **Managing enrolments**

### **Can my service reduce 4-year-old enrolments to accommodate Pre-Prep?**

The Best Start, Best Life reforms will increase the number of funded kindergarten program hours that children can access across Victoria. As Four-Year-Old Kindergarten transitions to Pre-Prep, and Three-Year-Old Kindergarten continues to roll-out across Victoria, some degree of change will be required at every service.

As a starting point, you are encouraged to consider how your service can deliver Pre-Prep while maintaining the number of 3- and 4-year-old enrolments at the service. This may mean implementing program modelling changes. The most suitable model for delivering Pre-Prep at your service will depend on the needs of your community, and preferences about how kindergarten programs are delivered.

If, after considering program modelling changes, your service is proposing to reduce 4-year-old enrolments to accommodate Pre-Prep you must notify the department. This may include services delivering Pre-Prep for the first time, or services looking to increase their Pre-Prep hours.

This notification requirement will help us effectively monitor reform implementation across the State.

More services are opening across the State to meet demand as the Best Start, Best Life reforms are implemented, so that where existing services do need to lower enrolments to implement the reforms, families will be able to access a funded kindergarten place locally.

Service providers will be informed when a risk emerges that children in a service's local area may not be able to access a funded Pre-Prep place. In these circumstances, the department will work with services in that local area to increase the number of enrolments, which may include developing options for new or expanded facilities, and reducing program hours in the interim if required.

If your service is planning to reduce the number of 4-year-old places offered in 2026 (to below 2025 enrolment levels) to deliver Pre-Prep, please contact your [ECIB](#). Further information about the notification process is available at: [Operational policies supporting the Best Start, Best Life reforms | vic.gov.au](#).

### **How can my service plan for Pre-Prep before knowing the number of enrolments?**

Services are encouraged to review their current and recent enrolments to understand the make-up of their cohort, and plan for appropriate program modelling adjustments to accommodate Pre-Prep.

For example, children currently enrolled in a service for Three-Year-Old Kindergarten in 2025 will be the cohort of children moving into Four-Year-Old Kindergarten in 2026. Services in non-roll out LGAs can consider their 2025 ESK/AEL enrolments when planning for the 2026 Pre Prep priority cohort roll-out.

For further information, including advice regarding the operational policy settings and support with local planning and programming options, please contact your [local ECIB](#).

### **Can my service cap the number of places made available to priority cohort children and offer places to other four-year-old children?**

If the service has funded kindergarten places available in four-year-old and mixed age programs, then it needs to offer that to all eligible priority cohort children (as per the department's Priority of Access criteria). If there are challenges in accommodating the additional Pre-Prep hours or enrolments required, then services should contact their [local ECIB](#).

It is expected that Pre-Prep hours will be available to all eligible children unless an exception has been granted.

### **What is the Priority of Access criteria for Pre-Prep?**

The department's [Priority of Access criteria](#) apply to all enrolments, including Pre-Prep. In instances where more eligible children apply for a place at a service than there are places available, services must prioritise children that meet the criteria (high priority children).

Children meeting the Pre-Prep priority cohort criteria will also meet the department's Priority of Access criteria. These children must be prioritised for a funded kindergarten place over children that do not meet any Priority of Access criteria.

Following application of the criteria for high priority children, services in Pre-Prep roll-out LGAs must prioritise children residing in the roll-out LGA and children residing outside the LGA whose closest service is located within the LGA over other children (who are not high priority children) who reside outside the LGA.

Table 1: Place allocation by Pre-Prep geographic roll-out schedule, 2026

Pre-Prep roll-out LGAs	<u>2025</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ararat Rural City</li> <li>• Gannawarra Shire</li> <li>• Hindmarsh Shire</li> <li>• Murrindindi Shire</li> <li>• Northern Grampians Shire</li> <li>• Yarriambiack Shire</li> </ul>	<u>2026</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benalla Rural City</li> <li>• Buloke Shire</li> <li>• Corangamite Shire</li> <li>• East Gippsland Shire</li> <li>• Horsham Rural City</li> <li>• Loddon Shire</li> <li>• Mansfield Shire</li> <li>• Mitchell Shire</li> <li>• Pyrenees Shire</li> <li>• Strathbogie Shire</li> <li>• Wangaratta Shire</li> <li>• Wodonga Shire</li> </ul>	Places allocated as follows: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.Children meeting priority of access criteria as outlined in the <a href="#">Kindergarten Funding Guide</a>, regardless of which LGA the child resides in.</li> <li>2.(For Pre-Prep enrolments only) Children residing in the LGA and children residing outside the LGA whose closest service is located within the LGA are to be prioritised for a place over other children from outside the LGA.</li> <li>3.Once all Priority of Access criteria have been applied, locally agreed criteria can be applied to prioritise children, such as those enrolled from a previous year, those with a sibling in the service, and/or those living closest to the service.</li> </ol>
Non-geographic Pre-Prep roll-out LGAs	All other LGAs		Places allocated as follows: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.Children meeting priority of access criteria as outlined in the <a href="#">Kindergarten Funding Guide</a>, regardless of which LGA the child resides in.</li> <li>2.Once all Priority of Access criteria have been applied, locally agreed criteria can be applied to prioritise children, such as those enrolled from a previous year, those with a sibling in the service, and/or those living closest to the service.</li> </ol>

### Can children attend a second year of funded Pre-Prep?

Yes, if they meet the eligibility requirements and have not accessed a second year of funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten.

Information for families and early childhood education professionals in relation to accessing an additional year of funded kindergarten can be accessed [here](#).

From 2026, children meeting the eligibility requirements can access an additional year of funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten or an additional year of funded Pre-Prep, but not both.

This means children enrolled in Three-Year-Old Kindergarten in 2025 may be eligible for a second year of funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten in 2026 if they meet the applicable eligibility requirements. Additional information on eligibility requirements to access an additional year of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten will be made available in mid-2025.

## Pre-Prep for children from priority cohorts

**Pre-Prep does not roll-out in my LGA until 2032 and my service does not have children from a priority cohort currently enrolled. What do I need to do now to prepare for Pre-Prep?**

All services need to consider how they would deliver Pre-Prep to a child from a priority cohort in any year from 2026, even if they do not have any current enrolments of eligible children. Services should be ready to respond to inquiries from families about enrolling eligible children in Pre-Prep (e.g., how many hours will be delivered, across which combinations of groups), regardless of the LGA in which the service is located.

**Does my service have to deliver the maximum number of Pre-Prep hours to eligible children from a priority cohort?**

No. Services are encouraged to offer children from priority cohorts as many funded kindergarten hours as possible, up to the maximum of funded hours specified in the roll-out schedule. The roll-out of Pre-Prep to children from priority cohorts provides the opportunity for services to deliver more funded hours to children who will benefit the most from increased access to kindergarten. However, services have flexibility to deliver between 16 hours per week for 40 weeks (640 hours per year) and the maximum number of funded hours specified in the roll-out schedule to children from priority cohorts. In 2026, this will be between 16 and 25 hours.

The department will work with services on opportunities to maximise hours for children from priority cohorts, while monitoring for any risk that children may not be able to access a funded kindergarten place.

**How does my service protect the privacy of families with children from a priority cohort while delivering a higher number of hours?**

Services should maintain existing practice relating to privacy and the handling of confidential family details, including eligibility for Pre-Prep or ESK.

Services may also consider how their program models support the privacy of children from priority cohorts. The program model should promote access, meaningful participation and positive outcomes, while also protecting the privacy of families and children. For example, rotational groups, where children attend in different combinations each day, may support the privacy of children receiving more funded hours than their peers whilst maximising the number of hours the child can access.

The [‘Delivering Pre-Prep to children from priority cohorts’](#) guide will assist services to deliver additional Pre-Prep hours to children from a priority cohort. Services should also contact their [local ECIB](#) for program modelling support.

**My service is not in a Pre-Prep roll-out LGA until later in the roll-out schedule. Should it deliver a Pre-Prep program specifically for children from priority cohorts?**

Victorian kindergarten funding policy requires all funded services to promote fair and equitable access to kindergarten programs and have a priority of access policy in place. Service providers are not permitted to restrict enrolment in a funded kindergarten program to specific cohorts of children.

All services are encouraged to explore how they could support a higher number of Pre-Prep hours for children from priority cohorts from 2026 and 2028 (when children from families with a Commonwealth concession card become eligible for Pre-Prep).

Services that usually have a very high proportion of children from Pre-Prep priority cohorts enrolling in their kindergarten programs are encouraged to contact their [local ECIB](#) for support in program development.

Services interested in expanding their engagement with and/or service offering for Pre-Prep priority cohorts from 2026 are also encouraged to contact their [local ECIB](#).

### **What is the minimum amount of Pre-Prep hours a child from a priority cohort should receive in 2028?**

All services in the 6 2025 Pre-Prep roll-out LGAs must deliver between 16 and 30 hours of Pre-Prep to all children, including priority cohort children.

In 2026, services must offer between 16 and 25 hours for any children that meet the 2026 Pre-Prep priority cohort eligibility (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from a refugee or asylum seeker background, children who have had contact with Child Protection). Additionally:

- If the service is in one of the 12 2026 Pre-Prep roll-out LGAs, the service must deliver between 16 and 20 hours of Pre-Prep to all non-priority cohort children in the service.

In 2028, services must offer between 16 to 30 hours for children who meet the 2026 Pre-Prep priority cohort eligibility and 16 to 25 hours for children who meet the 2028 Pre-Prep priority cohort eligibility (concession card holders and children from a multiple birth (triplets or more)). Additionally:

- If the service is in one of the 2026, 2027 or 2028 Pre Prep roll-out LGAs, the service must deliver between 16 and 20 hours of Pre-Prep to all non-Priority Cohort children in the service.

## **Three-Year-Old Kindergarten**

### **Can my service reduce Three-Year-Old Kindergarten hours or enrolments to accommodate Pre-Prep?**

Services cannot reduce Three-Year-Old Kindergarten hours or enrolments to accommodate Pre-Prep, or increase Pre-Prep program hours, without seeking prior approval from the department.

If you are considering reducing your Three-Year-Old Kindergarten hours or places offered at your service, you should discuss it with your local [Early Childhood Improvement Branch](#) as early as possible. The department will consider proposals on a case-by-case basis.

### **Will a child eligible for Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) or supported by Access to Early Learning (AEL) be eligible for Pre-Prep hours?**

Children accessing an ESK or AEL program as 3-year-olds are eligible for Pre-Prep as 4-year-olds from 2026.

To enable better planning for Pre-Prep, services are encouraged to ensure 3-year-old children eligible for ESK are enrolled as an ESK enrolment. Children accessing an AEL or ESK program should also be supported in transitioning into Pre-Prep.

There are no changes to the ESK or AEL programs for 3-year-olds as a result of the roll-out of Pre-Prep.

For further information see:

- [Early Start Kindergarten | vic.gov.au \(www.vic.gov.au\)](http://www.vic.gov.au)
- [Access to Early Learning | vic.gov.au \(www.vic.gov.au\)](http://www.vic.gov.au)

## **Additional information**

### **Where can I get more information about how to apply the policy settings to my service's circumstances?**

For further information, including advice regarding the operational policy settings and support with local planning and programming options, please contact your [local ECIB](#).

For further resources and information about funded kindergarten please see:

*Best Start, Best Life reforms*

- [The Best Start, Best Life reforms | vic.gov.au](https://www.vic.gov.au/the-best-start-best-life-reforms)
- [Why 2 years and more time? | vic.gov.au](https://www.vic.gov.au/why-2-years-and-more-time)
- [Operational policies supporting the Best Start, Best Life reforms | vic.gov.au](https://www.vic.gov.au/operational-policies-supporting-the-best-start-best-life-reforms)
- [Four-Year-Old Kindergarten is becoming Pre-Prep | vic.gov.au \(www.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.vic.gov.au/four-year-old-kindergarten-is-becoming-pre-prep)
- [Kindergarten Sector Guide](https://www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-sector-guide)

*Workforce supports*

- [Best Start, Best Life Workforce Strategy | vic.gov.au \(www.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.vic.gov.au/best-start-best-life-workforce-strategy)
- [Directory of programs | vic.gov.au](https://www.vic.gov.au/directory-of-programs)

*Communicating about the reforms*

- [Communicating about kindergarten to your community](https://www.vic.gov.au/communicating-about-kindergarten-to-your-community)
- [Supporting CALD families to engage in kindergarten | vic.gov.au](https://www.vic.gov.au/supporting-cald-families-to-engage-in-kindergarten)

*Other resources*

- [Kindergarten funding guide | vic.gov.au \(www.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide)
- [Early childhood education – information for professionals | vic.gov.au \(www.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.vic.gov.au/early-childhood-education-information-for-professionals)
- [Change Management Toolkit](https://www.vic.gov.au/change-management-toolkit)
- [Delivering Pre-Prep to children from a priority cohort guide](https://www.vic.gov.au/delivering-pre-prep-to-children-from-a-priority-cohort-guide)

*Video resources*

- [Pre-Prep is available in 2026 – with Bachar Houli](https://www.vic.gov.au/pre-prep-is-available-in-2026-with-bachar-houli)
- [Pre-Prep in 2025 and 2026 on Vimeo](https://www.vic.gov.au/pre-prep-in-2025-and-2026-on-vimeo)