

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](#).

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 services
- children who were supported by the Access to Early Learning program in their Three-Year-Old Kindergarten year.

If your service or families at your service are experiencing exceptional circumstances that mean you are not able to deliver the minimum number of hours to children eligible for Pre-Prep, contact your local [Early Childhood Improvement Branch](#) as soon as possible. These specialist staff can provide funding advice and offer a range of tailored supports to suit your unique circumstances.

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, which equates to 672 hours across the year, 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. Services seeking to understand applicable industrial arrangements may wish to contact their relevant early childhood education peak bodies and unions.

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 enrolling their child at a service enrol 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. Resources for families promoting the benefits of more hours of a funded kindergarten program will be made available to support these conversations.

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 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.

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 service that is in a 2026 roll-out LGA must deliver a free Pre-Prep program of 16-20 hours per week, and 16-25 hours per week at no charge 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. In addition:

- services must communicate clearly to families that a free 20-hour per week Pre-Prep program (or free 25 hours of Pre-Prep per week for children from a priority cohort) is available and there's no obligation to pay for more hours
- families who opt for longer hours should not be prioritised over families who meet the priority of access criteria.

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. Funded kindergarten fee policies do not apply.

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 includes services reducing 4-year-old places offered to deliver Pre-Prep hours for the first time and those reducing 4-year-old places offered to increase Pre-Prep program hours delivered.

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.

The process for notifying the department of an intention to reduce 4-year-old enrolments will be made available in due course.

What are the priority of access criteria for Pre-Prep?

The department's [priority of access criteria](#) apply to 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). All children eligible for 16-25 hours of Pre-Prep in 2026 are high priority children under the department's priority of access criteria and must be prioritised a funded kindergarten place over children who do not meet the 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.

Once children meeting these criteria have been allocated a place, local 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.

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.

Currently, children meeting the eligibility requirements can access an additional year of funded Four-Year-Old Kindergarten, but not 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. Additional information on how this policy will be extended to children in Three-Year-Old Kindergarten will be made available in 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. 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 Early Start Kindergarten.

Services may also consider how their program models support the privacy of children from priority cohorts. 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.

**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 can support a higher number of Pre-Prep hours for children from priority cohorts from 2026.

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 [Early Childhood Improvement Branch](#) 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 [Early Childhood Improvement Branch](#).

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. Further information about the process for seeking approval from the department will be available in the first half of 2025.

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 Pre-Prep reforms.

For further information see:

- [Early Start Kindergarten | vic.gov.au \(www.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.vic.gov.au/early-start-kindergarten)
- [Access to Early Learning | vic.gov.au \(www.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.vic.gov.au/access-to-early-learning)

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 Early Childhood Improvement Branch](#).

For further information about funded kindergarten please see:

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