# 2024 free kinder funding requirements

**Sessional services**

## Key information for sessional services

Free Kinder is available in Three- and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten programs at services.

Families with children enrolled in participating sessional kindergarten services receive a free program:

* for Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, there will be no charge for a program of 5-15 hours per week (200 – 600 hours a year)
* for Four-Year-Old Kindergarten, there will be no charge for a program of 15 hours per week (600 hours a year).

The 2024 [Free Kinder funding rates for sessional services](https://www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-rates) are available on the department’s website.

## 2024 Free Kinder funding requirements for sessional services

Funded sessional kindergarten service providers accessing this funding must:

* offer a free 15-hour kindergarten program for Four-Year-Old Kindergarten
* offer a free kindergarten program of 5-15 hours for Three-Year-Old Kindergarten
* not charge families any compulsory out-of-pocket fees or levies
* refund enrolment deposits upon the child’s commencement in the funded kindergarten program
* communicate clearly to families about Free Kinder, including that:
  + a free 15-hour program is available and there’s no obligation to buy more hours
  + Priority of Access (PoA) rules apply, with all PoA children to be given priority over others, regardless of whether they are enrolling in more than 15 hours
  + any donations are voluntary and not required for participation in the kindergarten program
* maximise use of licensed capacity to meet demand for 3- and 4-year-old enrolments.

### Confirming a child’s funded kindergarten program

Services must tell families that their child can only access a funded kindergarten program at one service at a time. Services must also make sure that all families have a signed form that confirms where their child will go for their funded program and keep a copy on record at the service.

All services should use the department’s “one funded place” [form](https://www.vic.gov.au/resources-funded-kindergartens). This form can be included in an enrolment pack, either on paper or online and needs a parent or carer signature.

If a child is enrolled at more than one service and funding is paid to a service where the family does not wish to claim their funded place, the department will recoup the funding.

### Sessional services with programs over 15 hours

As a condition of Free Kinder funding, services must offer all families a free 15-hour program. Any extra hours beyond the 15-hour program must be optional.

If services offer more hours, they can charge families for them. Services should make sure families understand how to choose only the free program, and that any extra hours are optional.

The fees for these extra hours can be set by the service in consultation with their community. These fees are not subject to funded kindergarten fee policies.

Families who opt for longer hours should not be prioritised over families who meet the Priority of Access criteria.

### Sessional services offering wrap-around care

Some sessional services may offer ‘wrap-around care’. These optional extra care hours are not part of a 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. Families may also receive Commonwealth Childcare Support (CCS) for these care hours.

### Registration fees, enrolment deposits and levies

#### **Enrolment deposits**

Services must refund any enrolment deposits once the child starts attending the service.

To make sure that families can access services without facing financial barriers, providers are strongly encouraged to:

* exempt families that meet the [Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS) eligibility criteria](https://www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide) from waitlist and registration fees
* not charge an enrolment deposit to families that meet the KFS eligibility criteria
* ensure that any enrolment deposits are of a reasonable cost.

#### **Registration fees**

Registration fees, which can also be called waitlist or administration fees, are not covered by the Free Kinder subsidy. This is because they are separate to the fee for delivery of the kindergarten program. This means that a non-refundable fee may be charged when:

* families register their child via a Central Registration and Enrolment Scheme
* families register their child on a waitlist at a service (this is solely an administrative fee and must be of a reasonable cost).

#### **Other fees and levies**

Services can charge families late pick-up fees if this is the service’s policy and has been clearly communicated to parents. This is because it’s separate to the fee charged for the delivery of the core kindergarten program.

Services must not charge any compulsory out-of-pocket fees or levies to families, e.g., maintenance fees, membership fees.

### Excursions

Services can ask families to cover the costs of excursions, (e.g., to pay for tickets or transportation). However, families with children that meet the eligibility criteria for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy should not be asked to pay for these trips.

Some services may request payment for excursions at the beginning of the year. In these cases, services must refund any surplus funds that have not been used for the cost recovery of excursions at the end of the year.

Families cannot be charged for incursions or regular excursions that are a core part of the kindergarten program, like Bush Kinder.

### Communicating with parents

Sessional kindergarten services must provide families with the following information:

* that a free 15-hour program (5-15 hours for Three-Year-Old Kindergarten) is available without the need to buy extra hours
* that PoA provisions apply, with all PoA children to be given priority over all other children regardless of whether they are enrolling in more than 15 hours
* that any donations are voluntary and not required for participation in the kindergarten program
* that enrolment deposits are refundable
* which families are exempt from paying enrolment deposits and/or waitlist fees (e.g. children that meet the eligibility criteria for Kindergarten Fee Subsidy)
* detail of any fees for optional additional hours or wrap-around care, if required
* detail of any other allowable charges (e.g. late fees), if required
* that one-off excursions may have associated costs, but children eligible for KFS will not be charged
* that if families attend more than one kindergarten or long day care service they must choose where their child will take part in in the funded kindergarten program and get the Free Kinder funding.
* that children eligible for Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) are enrolled and funded as an ESK enrolment.

This information must also be included in the service’s kindergarten fee policy.

Free Kinder must be well-promoted and explained through services’ communication channels, including websites. You can find [communications resources](https://www.vic.gov.au/communicating-about-kindergarten-to-your-community) on the department website including a factsheet and letter for families, as well as website and social media content.

Services should also consider if translated materials and/or a translator would be of benefit to families.

## Confirmation of participation in Free Kinder

Service providers will be required to confirm their participation in Free Kinder for 2024.

## If a service is new or starts offering funded kindergarten during the year, they'll be asked to confirm their participation as part of the application for funding process.

## Monitoring and compliance with funding requirements

The department will actively monitor compliance with the Free Kinder funding requirements. The department, or an organisation engaged to monitor compliance on behalf of the department, may seek additional information and documents from service providers as part of an assurance process. This is to ensure the full benefits are being passed on to parents and that all Free Kinder funding is being used correctly and according to requirements.

## Free Kinder payment to services

[Free Kinder funding rates for 2024](https://www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-rates) are available on the department’s website.

Free Kinder funding is an extra payment to services to cover the parent fee component. This funding is paid on top of other kindergarten funding streams (excluding Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS), KFS Ratio Supplement and Early Start Kindergarten (ESK)).

The Free Kinder payment replaces KFS and the KFS Ratio Supplement for participating services and is included in the ESK rate.

KFS will continue to be available for sessional services that do not participate in Free Kinder.

### Funding for hours of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten

Funding for Three-Year-Old Kindergarten enrolments based on the number of hours a child spends in a funded program, which can range from 5 to 15 hours.

If a child is enrolled in a Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program for the full 15 hours per week, the service will be paid the full funding amount for that child.

If a child is enrolled for fewer than 15 hours, the funding will be adjusted proportionally. For example, if a 3-year-old child is enrolled in a kindergarten program for 7.5 hours per week, they will receive half of the full 15-hour Free Kinder rate.

### Payment of funding

Free Kinder payments will be made monthly via the Kindergarten Information Management System (KIMS). Free Kinder funding is prorated from a service’s funding start date.

Services should ensure their enrolment data in KIMS is up to date to ensure accurate payments each month.

# Frequently asked questions

## Can we seek voluntary donations or fundraise?

All services may receive voluntary parent payments or conduct other fundraising activities, as well as receiving Free Kinder payments. However, services must make sure that families know that giving donations or participating in activities like working bees is optional.

## What happens if a child moves from one service to another in the kindergarten year?

Some children move from one service to another during the kindergarten year. In these cases, the Free Kinder funding will cease at the first service and payments will be paid to the new service (if that service is participating in Free kinder).

## Do I need to enrol children eligible for Early Start Kindergarten?

It’s important that you continue to enrol eligible children in Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) at your service. This helps service providers receive their full funding entitlement and ensures these children have access to 15 funded hours of kindergarten across Victoria.

ESK enrolments play a role in calculating School Readiness Funding (SRF) for service providers. It also allows us to continue to monitor efforts to engage the most vulnerable children in kindergarten across Victoria and provide extra targeted support where needed through SRF or Early Childhood LOOKOUT.

## How is the priority of access applied in a Free Kinder setting?

All 3- and 4-year-old children in participating services will get Free Kinder funding. But, if there's more demand than available spots at a service, the Priority of Access (PoA) policy should be applied.

Even though families are not required to show evidence such as a health care card, pension card or humanitarian visa to access a free program anymore, it’s important that Central Registration and Enrolment Scheme providers and kindergarten services collect all necessary information to apply the [PoA Criteria](https://www.vic.gov.au/priority-access-criteria). They should also record this information in KIMS to support monitoring participation for vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

## Why are the Free Kinder subsidies different in sessional and long day cares?

Free Kinder funding works differently in the 2 settings. For integrated long day care programs, the service must pass the full Free Kinder savings on as a fee offset to families. This is because fees are charged for all hours of education and care, not just the kindergarten program hours, and the fees can vary based on factors like the family’s Commonwealth Child Care Subsidy entitlement.

Free Kinder in sessional programs functions as a fee replacement for the service. The sessional rate has been set higher to enable sessional services to offer a free 15-hour program without changing their current fee structure.

## Can service providers opt in at a program level? (i.e., opt-in for the Four-Year-old Kindergarten program only and not the Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program)?

Services that are participating in Free Kinder must offer a free program for all children enrolled in kindergarten at their service. Services cannot only offer Free Kinder to some groups of children (e.g., cannot offer Free Kinder for Four-Year-Old Kindergarten and not Three-Year-Old Kindergarten).