# 2025 Free Kinder Funding Requirements

**Sessional service providers**

## Key information for sessional service providers

Free Kinder is available for Three- and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten or Pre-Prep programs at participating 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 between 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)
* for Pre-Prep, there will be no charge for a program between 16 and 30 hours per week (640-1200 hours per year).

The 2025 Free Kinder funding rates for sessional services are available [here](https://www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-rates). Sessional services that offer a long day care program should also refer to the [Free Kinder funding requirements for long day care services](https://www.vic.gov.au/free-kinder-funding-requirements-long-day-care-providers).

## 2025 Free Kinder funding requirements for sessional services

Funded sessional kindergarten service providers accessing this funding are required to:

* offer a free 15-hour kindergarten program for Four-Year-Old Kindergarten enrolments or a free kindergarten program of between 16 and 30 hours for Pre-Prep enrolments and a free kindergarten program of between 5 and 15 hours for Three-Year-Old Kindergarten enrolments
* not charge any compulsory out-of-pocket fees or levies to families, except for:
  + one-off excursions (i.e. entry and transport costs) or one-off incursions (e.g. an external provider attends the service to deliver a one-off activity/presentation) for children that are not identified as being part of a priority group (as outlined in the [Kindergarten Funding Guide](https://www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide). Children whose families are unable to make these payments due to financial hardship, must not be excluded from the activity.
  + Registration fees (also sometimes called waitlist or administration fees) where this fee is solely administrative and is not tied to delivery of the kindergarten program. To avoid imposing financial barriers to families seeking access, providers are strongly encouraged to exempt families in priority groups from registration fees.
  + Late pick-up fees if this is the service’s policy and has been clearly communicated to parents.
* Not charge for regular excursions (including Bush Kinder) or regular incursions (e.g. fortnightly music or weekly sport programs) that are a core part of the kindergarten program.
* 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 (or 16-30 hour program where a service offers Pre-Prep) is available without any need or expectation to purchase additional hours
  + Priority of Access (PoA) provisions apply, with all PoA children to be given priority over all other children regardless of whether they are enrolling in more than the relevant Free Kinder hours
  + that any donations are voluntary and not required for participation in the kindergarten program
* maximise use of licensed capacity as required to meet demand for three- and four-year-old enrolments.

### Confirmation of funded kindergarten program

Services must tell families that their child can only go to one funded kindergarten program, at one service at a time Services must ensure 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 must use the department's [one funded place declaration form](https://www.vic.gov.au/resources-funded-kindergartens#for-sharing-with-parents) This can be included in an enrolment pack in hardcopy or electronically, but it must be completed with a parent/carer signature (hardcopy or electronic) and remain on the department’s template.

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 offering additional hours

As a condition of Free Kinder funding, services must offer all families:

* a free three-year-old kindergarten program between 5-15 hours each week (200-600 hours each year)
* a free four-year-old kindergarten program for 15 hours each week (200-600 hours each year)
* a free Pre-Prep kindergarten program for 16-30 hours each week (640-1200 hours each year)..

Where longer program hours are offered these additional hours must be optional.

If a service offers more hours over and above the free program hours, they can charge families for them. Services must 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 that fall within the department’s PoA criteria.

### Sessional services offering wrap-around care

Some sessional services may offer wrap-around care. This is optional extra care hours, 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 families can access services without facing financial barriers, providers are strongly encouraged to:

* exempt families in priority groups (as outlined in the [Kindergarten Funding Guide](https://www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide)) from waitlist and registration fees
* not charge an enrolment deposit to families in priority groups
* ensure that any enrolment deposits are of a reasonable cost.

**Registration fees**

Registration fees (also sometimes called waitlist or administration fees) are allowed to be charged and do not need to be refunded where this fee is solely administrative and is not tied to delivery of the kindergarten program. This means that a non-refundable fee may be charged when families register their child on a waitlist at a service (this is solely an administrative fee and must be of a reasonable cost).

To avoid imposing financial barriers to families seeking access, providers are strongly encouraged to exempt families in priority groups from registration fees.

**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 is 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 and Incursions

Services can ask families to cover the costs for occasional one-off excursions (e.g. entry and transport costs) and one-off incursions (e.g. an external provider attends the service to deliver a one-off activity/presentation). Families in priority groups as set out in the [Kindergarten Funding Guide](https://www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide) should not be required to pay for excursions or incursions.

Children whose families are unable to make these payments due to financial hardship, must not be excluded from the activity.

Some services may request payment for these activities 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 one-off excursions or incursions at the end of the year.

Families cannot be charged for regular excursions (including Bush Kinder) or regular incursions (e.g. fortnightly music or weekly sport programs) that are a core part of the kindergarten program.

### 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 or 16-30 hours for Pre-Prep) is available without the need to purchase additional 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 the relevant Free Kinder 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 in priority groups)
* 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 incursions and one-off excursions may have associated costs, but children in priority groups will not be charged
* that where families attend more than one sessional kindergarten/long day care service they must choose where their child will participate in the funded kindergarten program (and receive 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 the service’s communication channels, including their website. You can find a [communications pack](https://www.vic.gov.au/communicating-about-kindergarten-to-your-community) on the department’s 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

The department will advise service providers via email of the 2025 process for confirming Free Kinder participation.

## 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 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 2025 are available on the [kindergarten funding rates](https://www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-rates).

Free Kinder funding is an additional payment to services to cover the parent fee.This payment is 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 Free Kinder 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

The department funds 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’ll receive half of the full 15-hour Free Kinder rate.

### Funding for hours of Pre-Prep

In 2025, a small number of local government areas will commence offering [Pre-Prep](https://www.vic.gov.au/preprep?gad_source=1&gclid=EAIaIQobChMI-aLTzNmjiQMVbjaDAx2jTiDlEAAYASAAEgJD_fD_BwE).

The department funds Pre-Prep enrolments based on the number of hours that they access a funded program from 16 to 30 hours. For example, if a 4-year-old child is enrolled in a program of 22.5 hours per week, they will receive 1.5 times the 15-hour Free Kinder rate. A program of 30 hours will receive double the 15-hour rate in 2025.

### Payment of funding

Free Kinder payments will be made monthly via the Kindergarten Information Management System (KIMS). Free Kinder funding is calculated pro-rata 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 ensure that families know that giving donations, or participating in activities like working bees etc 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 will cease at the first service and payments will be paid to the new service (if that service is participating in Fre Kinder).

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

Yes, it is important that you continue to enrol eligible children in ESK at your service. This ensures service providers receive their funding entitlements and that these children have access to 15 funded hours of kindergarten across Victoria.

ESK enrolments numbers contribute to School Readiness Funding (SRF) calculations for service providers. Enrolling children in ESK also allows the department to continue to monitor efforts to engage the most vulnerable children in kindergarten across Victoria and provide additional targeted support where required through SRF or Early Childhood LOOKOUT.

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

While all three- and four-year-old children will attract Free Kinder funding in participating services, the [Priority of Access](https://www.vic.gov.au/priority-access-criteria) (PoA) policy is still required to be applied where demand exceeds available places at a particular service.

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 through the KFS, it is 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). Providers are asked to record this information in KIMS to keep track of 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 two settings. For integrated long day care programs, the service must pass the full Free Kinder payment 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 participating sessional services to offer a free 15-hour program (or equivalent 16-30 hour Pre-Prep 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 or Pre-prep and not Three-Year-Old Kindergarten).