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**Best Start**  
**Best Life**



# Kindergarten Sector Guide



Department of Education



## 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 6 local government areas (LGAs) launch Pre-Prep.

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 – 2025

- Three-Year-Old Kindergarten continues to be delivered, with services offering programs between 5 and 15 hours
- Free Kinder is available
- Six LGAs start Pre-Prep, with a further 12 LGAs preparing to launch Pre-Prep in 2026
- Work is underway to support the statewide launch in 2026 of Pre-Prep for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from a refugee or asylum seeker background, and children who have had contact with Child Protection services
- The first 4 Victorian Government-owned early learning and childcare centres open
- Services will begin to transition from the Kindergarten Information Management System (KIMS) to Arrival.

## Resources

- [vic.gov.au/communicating-about-kindergarten-to-your-community](https://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/childcare/sector-guide-video-resources](https://vic.gov.au/childcare/sector-guide-video-resources) for a collection of video resources that may also be of use when talking with families
- [vic.gov.au/childcare/supporting-cultural-families-engage-kindergarten](https://vic.gov.au/childcare/supporting-cultural-families-engage-kindergarten) for programs and resources to support engagement with cultural and linguistically diverse families
- [vic.gov.au/childcare/kinder/translations](https://vic.gov.au/childcare/kinder/translations) for information in 30 languages about kindergarten in Victoria
- [vic.gov.au/arrival](https://vic.gov.au/childcare/arrival) for more information on Arrival.



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 3- and 4-year-old children at participating Victorian services in standalone (sessional) kindergartens and long day care centres.
- **Pre-Prep:** Four-Year-Old Kindergarten is becoming Pre-Prep with programs across Victoria increasing to 30 hours each week by 2036.
- **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.
- **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 Three- and 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](https://earlylearning.vic.gov.au) for information about confirmed new 2025 and 2026 early learning and childcare centre sites, and frequently asked questions, such as how locations are chosen
- [vic.gov.au/best-start-best-life-reforms](https://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 chose to offer Free Kinder.

Free Kinder is for everyone. A Health Care Card or Australian citizenship is not required to access Free Kinder.

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 2025 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, which starts in 6 LGAs in 2025, 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 2025 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](#).
- 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.

It is important that families understand they can only access a funded kindergarten program through 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/kindergarten-funding-rates](https://vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-rates) for information about 2025 Free Kinder funding rates
- [vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide](https://vic.gov.au/kindergarten-funding-guide) for information about kindergarten funding and policies
- [vic.gov.au/communicating-about-kindergarten-to-your-community](https://vic.gov.au/communicating-about-kindergarten-to-your-community) for information about Free Kinder that can be shared with families
- [vic.gov.au/kindergarten-sector-guide-video-resources](https://vic.gov.au/kindergarten-sector-guide-video-resources) for videos about Free Kinder that can be shared with families
- [vic.gov.au/free-kinder-funding-requirements-sessional-services](https://vic.gov.au/free-kinder-funding-requirements-sessional-services) and [vic.gov.au/free-kinder-funding-requirements-long-day-care-providers](https://vic.gov.au/free-kinder-funding-requirements-long-day-care-providers) for specific information on funding requirements
- [vic.gov.au/resources-funded-kindergartens](https://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 2,900 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. Services will be funded pro-rata for the program hours delivered.

Where places are limited, the participation of children is prioritised over the number of weekly program hours delivered.

Services should not increase their Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program hours in 2025 if this lowers the number of 3- or 4-year-old places that were offered in 2024. For more information about the flexible hours policy and eligibility for an exception, refer to the [department's operational policies supporting the Best Start, Best Life reforms](#).

### 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
- **2023-2025:** 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 3-year-olds to enjoy at home.

### Resources

- [vic.gov.au/funding-and-policies-supporting-three-year-old-kindergarten](https://vic.gov.au/funding-and-policies-supporting-three-year-old-kindergarten) for more information on flexible hours and other policies relating to Three-Year-Old Kindergarten
- [vic.gov.au/operational-policies-supporting-best-start-best-life-reforms](https://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/second-year-funded-four-year-old-kindergarten](https://vic.gov.au/second-year-funded-four-year-old-kindergarten) for more information about an additional year of kindergarten (note – this page will be updated shortly to reflect new policy)
- [vic.gov.au/kinderkits](https://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](https://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 will gradually transition to Pre-Prep, with programs increasing from 15 to 30 hours each week by 2036.

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.

Pre-Prep will launch in 6 LGAs in regional Victoria in 2025, and will gradually roll out across the state.

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 in Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong.
- From 2034, Pre-Prep will begin 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. Children supported by Access to Early Learning to attend Three-Year-Old Kindergarten will also be eligible.
- 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](https://vic.gov.au/pre-prep) for information about Pre-Prep and the roll-out schedule. You can also find a calculator here that families can use to check their child’s eligibility for Pre-Prep.

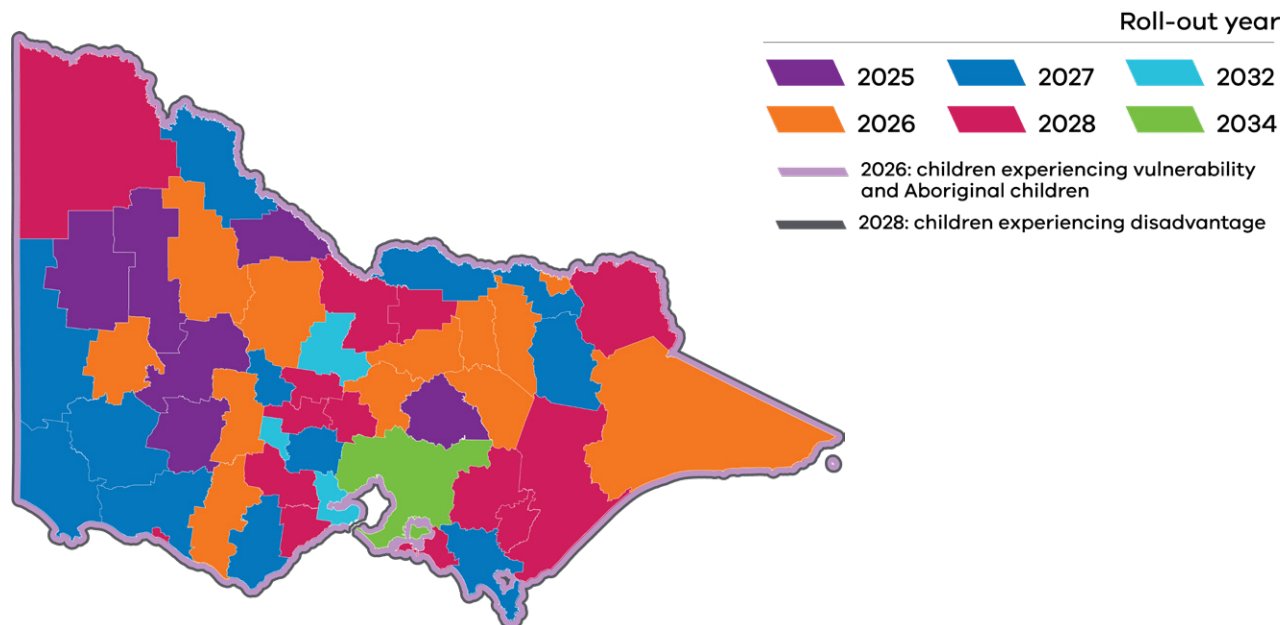


Photo: Leongatha Children's Centre



## 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 measures in place to provide support for services to attract and retain the early childhood workforce, including:

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

- scholarships, upskill programs for educators, innovative initial teacher education, tertiary partnerships, traineeships and access to Free TAFE to improve the accessibility and quality of pre-service training
- financial incentives and recruitment supports, as well as induction and mentoring supports for early career teachers, to enhance the transition from study to practice for the current workforce
- professional development and career supports, including coaching, communities of practice, and Early Years Learning Networks, and programs to enhance leadership and career development.

### Resources

- [vic.gov.au/shaping-the-best-start-best-life-reforms](https://vic.gov.au/shaping-the-best-start-best-life-reforms) to see the infrastructure and workforce strategies
- [schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/early-childhood-grants](https://schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/early-childhood-grants) for information about Building Blocks and other early childhood infrastructure grants
- [vic.gov.au/best-start-best-life-workforce-strategy/directory-programs](https://vic.gov.au/best-start-best-life-workforce-strategy/directory-programs) for current workforce programs across the 6 areas for action in the strategy
- [vic.gov.au/early-childhood-professional](https://vic.gov.au/early-childhood-professional) for information about job opportunities and support available for anyone interested in a career 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 have access to 1,800 hours of funded kindergarten before school, including 600 hours of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten and 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 has a particularly strong impact on children who need extra support.

### Resources

- [vic.gov.au/evidence-behind-2-years-kindergarten](https://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 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](https://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](https://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'.



## Supporting families with enrolment

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, including if this is done directly through the service, local council or Central Registration and Enrolment Scheme (CRES) provider.

### 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.

### Resources

- [vic.gov.au/when-start-kindergarten](http://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](http://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 are usually delivered by local councils.

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 how much time families have to respond to their 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 services 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 their CRES provider, Maternal Child Health nurse and other support service staff and organisations can also help them with the registration process, including gathering documentation.

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




Photo: Lilydale Children's Centre

Funded kindergartens and eligible early years support services, including CRES providers, can use an interpreter to support CALD families to register and enrol. 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 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. This is funded by the department at no cost to funded services.

### Resources

- [vic.gov.au/kindergarten-central-registration-and-enrolment](https://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](https://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](https://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](https://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

- [vic.gov.au/communicating-about-kindergarten-to-your-community](https://vic.gov.au/communicating-about-kindergarten-to-your-community) for resources to promote your kindergarten programs and enrolments
- [shout.finsbury.com.au/kinder/en-AU/](https://shout.finsbury.com.au/kinder/en-AU/) to order printed materials for your service from the Victorian Kindergarten Resource Portal, free of charge and delivered to your service.

## 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 support your engagement with children in priority cohorts who are eligible for early access to Pre-Prep from 2026. 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 embed an organisational culture of child safety, including through effective leadership arrangements.

The appropriate sharing of information to support child wellbeing or safety is also enabled through the **Child Information Sharing Scheme**.

The Victorian Early Years and Development Framework extends on this further, with services also responsible for creating welcoming and culturally inclusive environments for all children.

## 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, relating to 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’s important for services to accurately collect this information during enrolment.

Early Childhood Improvements Branches work with services to develop a School Readiness Funding Plan.

### Resources

- [vic.gov.au/school-readiness-funding](https://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 value of kindergarten to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and the community. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 3 and 4 can access 15 hours of free kindergarten each week through Early Start Kindergarten.

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/early-childhood-education-programs-supporting-aboriginal-children](https://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](https://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.

## Engaging with culturally and linguistically diverse families

There are a range of department resources and programs available to support families from CALD backgrounds to access and participate in kindergarten.

The department has a dedicated communications and engagement program that promotes the benefits of kindergarten to CALD families through targeted outreach, as well as through CALD media channels.

This includes the CALD Outreach Initiative. From January 2025 to June 2027, the department is funding 25 local councils to employ CALD outreach workers. CALD outreach workers address barriers to kindergarten access and participation for children and families from CALD backgrounds. They also support families to transition to school, as well as ongoing engagement and participation in education.

Other programs to support engagement with CALD families includes:

- The Foundation House Early Years Program – supports services to work with families from refugee backgrounds through providing resources, professional learning, consultancy and place-based programs.

- The Brotherhood of St Laurence Family Learning Support Program – provides bilingual outreach support to children and families from vulnerable CALD backgrounds living in public housing in some local government areas to connect with early childhood services and to support transition to school.
- 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.
- Early Childhood Language Services – provides access to free on-site, telephone and video interpreters and free written document translation for all department funded kindergarten services.

### Resources

- [vic.gov.au/supporting-cald-families-engage-kindergarten](https://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, a Community Event toolkit and information on the CALD Outreach Initiative
- [vic.gov.au/use-interpreter-early-childhood-education-services](https://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, including ‘Working effectively with interpreters to support families’

- [foundationhouse.org.au/specialised-programs/early-years](https://foundationhouse.org.au/specialised-programs/early-years) for information about the Foundation House Early Years Program, including the Communities of Practice (CoPs), resources, videos and case studies on supporting children and families from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds to participate in early childhood education
- [bsl.org.au/services/family-support/family-learning-support-program](https://bsl.org.au/services/family-support/family-learning-support-program) for more information about the Brotherhood of St Laurence Family Learning Support Program
- [vic.gov.au/fka-childrens-services-cultural-inclusion-support-packages](https://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](https://vic.gov.au/kinder/translations) for translated information about Free Kinder, the benefits of 2 years of kindergarten, how to enrol and more – there are 30 different languages available.



## 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](https://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](https://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](https://vic.gov.au/early-start-kindergarten) for information about ESK – 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](https://vic.gov.au/lookout-education-support-centres) for more information about the support available, and area contact details.



Photo: Tyabb Preschool



## Access to Early Learning

Access to Early Learning (AEL) is an early intervention program for vulnerable 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.

For more information about how to refer to the AEL program, please contact your local AEL provider.

All 2025 AEL enrolments are eligible and should be supported to transition to Pre-Prep in 2026.

### Resources

- [vic.gov.au/access-early-learning](https://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 disability or developmental delay and high support needs or children with complex medical needs in an inclusive kindergarten environment.

Support can include:

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

#### Resources

- [vic.gov.au/kindergarten-inclusion-children-disabilities](http://vic.gov.au/kindergarten-inclusion-children-disabilities) for information about the types of KIS programs 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](http://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](http://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: Fish Creek Kindergarten



## Where to get more help

For more information, contact your local Early Childhood Improvement Branch, which can provide tailored support.

The department 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.

### Resources

- [vic.gov.au/leading-impact-events-early-childhood-leaders](https://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](https://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.

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**Best Start**  
**Best Life**

[vic.gov.au/kinder](https://vic.gov.au/kinder)

