

Best Start Best Life

Expanding your early childhood
education programs

Change management toolkit





Acknowledgement of Country

The department proudly acknowledges Victoria's Aboriginal communities and their rich culture and pays respect to their Elders past and present.

We acknowledge Aboriginal people as Australia's first peoples and as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and water on which we rely.

We recognise and value the ongoing contribution of Aboriginal people and communities to Victorian life and how this enriches us.

We embrace the spirit of reconciliation, working towards the equality of outcomes and ensuring an equal voice.

'Respecting Connections' (2023) by Nakia Cadd, a Gunditjmara, Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung, Bunitj, Boon Wurrung, Taungurung woman who grew up in the Northern suburbs of Melbourne.

'When thinking about acknowledging Country, it's about respecting those many different connections; to the land, sky, waters, animals, people and stories.'

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Introduction

The *Expanding your early childhood education programs – Change management toolkit* provides information to support early childhood services to plan and deliver the Best Start, Best Life reforms.

The reforms are the most significant change to the sector in a generation. This expansion of early childhood education in Victoria will give children more time in your programs during a period of rapid brain development. Having 2 years of quality early learning and a longer program in the year before school will benefit all Victorian children, families, and communities, and for some families and children will be life changing.

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, whether you are part of a large provider with multiple services, or a small kindergarten with a parent-run committee of management.

Change takes time, which is why the reforms have a staged roll-out. Services may find making gradual changes, with clearly defined steps, supports them to make an effective transition and for teams to adjust.



About the toolkit

This toolkit is for service leaders and centre managers/directors in standalone (sessional) kindergarten services and long day care centres. It will also be useful for teachers and educators.

It provides key information and tools to help you work with your team and families to plan and implement Pre-Prep and continue Three-Year-Old Kindergarten.

There is 'how to' information and examples about making program changes, such as using rotational models, multi-age groups, team teaching and teaching longer days.

Use the toolkit alongside:

- the [Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework](#) (VEYLDF), which provides guidelines and practice resources for all professionals who work with children aged 0 to 8
- the [Three-Year-Old Kindergarten teaching toolkit](#), which provides professional learning and practice support for services delivering funded programs.

Early childhood education services differ in type and size, with teams that have different experiences with managing change. You may find that some information in the toolkit isn't relevant for your service's current situation – the toolkit is designed so you can refer to information as needed by your service, depending on your circumstances. You can also return to the toolkit multiple times as needed.

Local Early Childhood Improvement Branches - specialist support available

Your [local Early Childhood Improvement Branch](#) can provide you with change management support, tailored to your service. This includes:

- program modelling and timetabling advice
- links to workforce resources and programs, and information about infrastructure grants
- specialist advice relating to the provision of high-quality programs in a range of settings
- local area knowledge and data to assist with planning programs that are responsive to the needs of the local community.

Resources



- [The Best Start, Best Life reforms](#)
- [Best Start, Best Life: Transforming early childhood education together](#)



Leading changes that work for you, your team and your families

The way your service makes changes to deliver the reforms will depend on what is right for your team and community. Use your knowledge of your service's unique needs and strengths to lead change in a way that supports and motivates your staff and provides the best outcomes for children and communities.



Three core change principles

How you approach change as a leader will influence how your staff and community experience and respond to changes. Setting a positive tone can inspire and motivate your team.

While there is no 'one size fits all' approach to leading change, there are some principles that have been identified by experts as being important.

The following 3 core principles for successfully leading change are based on research with leaders in early childhood services.

Strong vision and rationale

Establish a shared focus, including on your approach to change, desired outcomes, and benefits for children

Collective creativity

Unlock knowledge and ideas, draw on everyone's expertise. Use the strengths of your service, and promote team collaboration

Change narrative

Build a shared commitment to change — acknowledge your starting position, document the steps needed to achieve change, reflect and adapt as you go

- Having a **strong vision and rationale** and defining 'why we are doing this' will provide a touch point as you implement change.

Awareness of the benefits of Pre-Prep – for example, more hours can increase children's early literacy, numeracy and social skills – and the overall aims of the reforms will help you establish this vision with your team.

By regularly asking 'Will this step move us closer to realising our vision?' and 'Is this change still focused on our agreed outcomes?', you will be able to keep the change process on track.

- Encouraging the **collective creativity** of your team will strengthen your change process by drawing on all the available knowledge, skills, and experience of everyone involved.

Create space for your team to problem-solve challenges, including those relating to practice change.

Look to your team for ideas about implementing the agreed changes, reach out to other professionals for advice, and explore your planned changes with families and children.

- Maintaining a **narrative of change** will help your team make sense of where you began, what stage you are at, and where you want to get to.

You can document your change narrative in a range of ways, such as minutes of formal meetings, on a wall planner or in a simple diagram. Highlighting past achievements can motivate your team and provide a strong foundation for present and future changes.



[Watch Professor Nuttall describe these principles for leading change](#) at a 2024 Early Learning Leadership Forum.

Importance of communication

Effective communication underpins the 3 principles for leading change. How you communicate will be critical to creating ongoing awareness and promoting shared understanding. This applies to your team as well as families and carers in your community.

Change can sometimes create uncertainty, and misinformation can hinder the success of your change initiatives. Communicate clearly and transparently and provide regular updates on the reforms and changes at your service, as they happen.

See the [‘Engaging and working with your team’](#) and [‘Communicating with families’](#) sections of this toolkit, and the [Best Start, Best Life Talking points](#).

Overcoming barriers to change

Your team may experience the prospect and process of change in different ways – some may feel energised and enthusiastic, and others may feel uncomfortable or unsettled. Some may be hesitant to embark on a new change process. It’s important to have discussions with your staff before you make any changes.

Focusing on what your team does well and having relationships with each other that are based on positive regard can support and sustain the culture at your service as you undergo changes.

If resistance comes up, revisit the [core principles for leading change](#). Talking about the reasons for change and desired outcomes can help everyone make sense of new ways of working. These conversations and feedback may lead to adjustments to how your service is organised or identify any materials and resources needed to support the change.

Invite staff to play a role in solving an issue they identify. Generating possible solutions through brainstorming, researching and consulting others can expand your options and increase your collective creativity.

Where possible, consider likely sources of resistance in advance of meeting with your team so that you can more proactively address concerns and offer support.

References



- [Leadership in Early Childhood, A cultural-historical theory of practice development. Joce Nuttall, Linda Henderson, Elizabeth Wood, Jenny Martin. 2024.](#)





Establishing a vision for change

Having a strong vision and clear rationale for change can help you communicate about change.

Effective change leaders explain the purpose and need for change, before working with their team to create shared understanding of the changes.

When your team understands the 'why', it can provide them with direction, motivation, and greater purpose, and make change — the 'how' — easier to work through.



Benefits for children

Children's earliest experiences in life establish the foundations for their future. A 2-year early learning program, including more hours in the year before school, is supported by evidence from Australia and around the world. 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 they start school.

The value of more hours in the year before school

Four-Year-Old Kindergarten will gradually transition to Pre-Prep, which will continue to be a play-based program led by a qualified teacher. By full roll-out, children in all locations across Victoria will have access to 30 hours of Pre-Prep.

The additional hours of Pre-Prep mean even greater access to the many benefits of early childhood education.

Increased hours in the year before school gives more time for children of all backgrounds and abilities to deepen their learning and development.

Teachers and educators can provide more deliberate play experiences, which will give children opportunities to embed their learning.

As you prepare to implement the reforms, you may want to provide information to your staff and families in your kindergarten community about the evidence showing the benefits to children of 2 years of high-quality early learning and more hours in the year before school.

SECTOR INSIGHT



The value of play-based learning

A parent of 3 children, whose middle child participated in the first year of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten at Fish Creek Kindergarten in 2020, said 2 years of kindergarten helped her child with confidence, to build social skills, and a readiness to learn. Another parent of a child who attended Marrang Kindergarten in Stawell, who is also a primary school teacher, noted that kindergarten supports children with social skills and provides the tools and confidence to ask for help.

Another parent whose child attended Marrang Kindergarten and was initially anxious at the start of a day before being able to comfortably separate, said her son's favourite part of kindergarten was making friends. One parent also encouraged other families to see that while kindergarten can help set children up for their future, there are lots of opportunities for children to enjoy themselves, because "learning through play is what kinder is all about."

Motivating change

Achieving the vision you have for your service will depend on the team effort and commitment of your staff. Having a clear sense of the outcomes you want to achieve will provide a strong motive for change.

At the same time, pay attention to what matters most to individual staff and how these personal motivations relate to the shared focus and desired outcomes of your service.

Consider finding time for your team to meet and share views on what drives them in the delivery of quality kindergarten programs, and discuss 'what works' at your service, especially in relation to how changes are made. This can help you support individuals within the team to achieve their professional motivations as part of the change process.

For example, the reforms may present opportunities for new roles and responsibilities at your service. Your team may also identify training and development opportunities to support the change process, which can motivate and help people to embrace change.

Resources



- [The evidence behind 2 years and more time in kindergarten](#)
- [Play-based learning and your child](#)





Engaging and working with your team

The department encourages all services and providers to work closely with and invite the expertise of teachers, educators, and other staff in making changes to programs.

Your staff have deep knowledge of your service and their profession and will have valuable suggestions for how you introduce changes. This knowledge provides a source of **collective creativity** that you can draw on to implement change in the most effective way possible.



Collective creativity is one of the 3 proven principles for leading change in early childhood education, along with having a strong vision and rationale and maintaining a change narrative. Drawing on the collective creativity of your team is a vital part of working with your team and can lead to innovative change.

When staff are involved in planning and given the opportunity to contribute, it can increase their connection to their work and improve the quality of decisions. Genuinely involving your staff in the change process demonstrates that their experience and expertise is valued.

Early childhood peak bodies can provide resources to support the involvement of all staff, such as manuals, templates, workshops, and webinars. Contact your peak body for advice on what supports are available.

You may need to consider whether changes to staffing arrangements require staff consultation under the relevant industrial instrument (e.g., an enterprise agreement or award covering your service). If relevant, your peak body or industrial representative may be able to provide advice.

Engage early and often

Consider what the changes mean for your staff, including professional and personal impacts. Acknowledge these impacts and explain that you want to make the implementation of the reforms a positive professional experience, and you want to achieve this by working together.

SECTOR INSIGHT



Working together with staff, families, and other stakeholders

When Three-Year-Old Kindergarten was announced, a small single-room early learning centre in a Victorian regional town looked at how they could expand their Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program.

It was important to the service to maximise the educational benefits for children while balancing the needs and preferences of families and staff. They set up a consultation process with all stakeholders, including families, staff, and the local council.

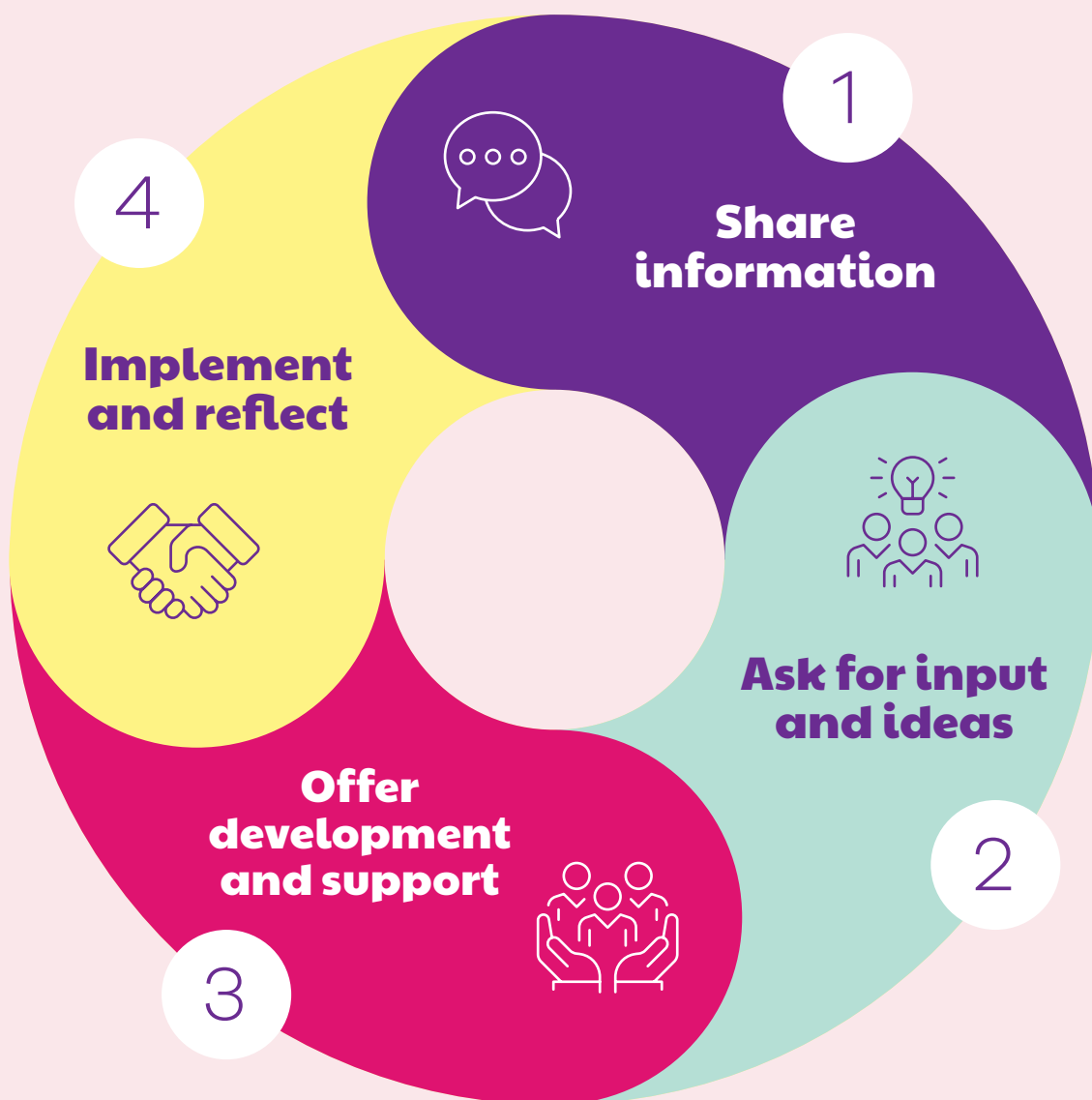
Several options were presented, including having 2 x 7.5-hour sessions or 2 x 6-hour and 1 x 3-hour session per week. Following discussions and feedback from stakeholders, a fortnightly timetable of 5 x 6-hour sessions was adopted, with 2 sessions one week and 3 sessions the following week.

Cycle of engagement

The following cycle of engagement can guide you to work together with your team as you implement changes.

As you work through this cycle, use the [Action Plan template](#) to break down the specific tasks you need to do to implement changes at your service.

As you record progress with these tasks, you can use this template to document your narrative of change. Alternatively, you can design your own approach, such as using the minutes of staff meetings to record information, progress, updates and impacts.



1. Share information

Provide your team with relevant information, as early as possible, about how your service is considering introducing Pre-Prep or increasing Three-Year-Old Kindergarten hours, and the options being explored. You could have a series of planning meetings where you share information about:

- proposed timeframes for Pre-Prep and Three-Year-Old Kindergarten (if scaling up to 15 hours)
- developing or revisiting your service’s vision and rationale for change
- how and when staff can provide input
- where to get more information or support.

Communicate face-to-face wherever possible, especially for important messages. Also check that your team understands the changes and impacts, and know they can ask any questions about any concerns they have.

2. Ask for input and ideas

Ask your staff for their views and suggestions about decisions that affect them, and any input they have received from families. It may be helpful to establish points in time to cover key topics where you will come back together for further discussion.

Use the [Your Guide To information sheets](#) to support your discussions, as they include tips about what to consider when planning for different approaches and questions for reflective discussion.

Respond to concerns and questions promptly and provide clear and accurate information to help your staff understand what’s happening and the reasons for any decisions following their input. Be clear and transparent and follow up with individuals about how they are dealing with the changes.

While you may not be able to act on all input, give staff the opportunity to have their views acknowledged and to be consulted about changes that will affect their work. Regular engagement will empower your team and allow for ongoing reflection on your progress.

Engage with families and your community and seek their insights and perspectives. See [‘Communicating with families’](#) for more information.

3. Offer development and support

Let your team know what support is available and ask them what they need. This may involve professional development, attending information and training sessions or assistance from a mentor. Consider whether whole-of-centre professional development in relation to your change process is an option for your team.

Your [Early Childhood Improvement Branch](#) will also be able to connect teachers and educators with their local Early Years Learning Network so that they can benefit from connections between peers and shared learning. Encourage your team to share knowledge and learn from others.

4. Implement and reflect on progress

As your plans progress, keep documenting key points in your change narrative. These do not always have to be through staff meetings, you could have:

- focus group discussions
- an email for feedback with questions relating to your change process
- a Google form or similar, that can provide anonymity if required
- a collaborative sticky note board for ideas and feedback
- Q&A sessions, facilitated by an external person if appropriate
- a trusted team representative who collects views and presents them to your service leadership
- an ‘open door’ policy, where you invite staff to provide feedback and ideas directly to you.

Provide regular updates about any changes at every step of your change process, including overviews of feedback received and decisions made if you presented proposals or invited ideas.

Regular discussion and reflective practice will provide a source of feedback and learning about your own leadership approach. It can also help you understand how your team is experiencing the change process so you can adapt your leadership approach, if necessary.

Resources



- [Leadership in Early Childhood, A cultural-historical theory of practice development. Joce Nuttall, Linda Henderson, Elizabeth Wood, Jenny Martin. 2024.](#)



Where you are now

Highlighting past achievements can motivate your team and provide a strong foundation for considering future changes. Acknowledging what your team has already achieved can equip them to implement new changes and form a powerful part of your **change narrative**.



Maintaining a change narrative is one of the 3 proven principles for leading change in early childhood education, along with having a strong vision and rationale and utilising the collective creativity of your team. Having a change narrative will assist you to explain what you are doing and why, and help your team stay motivated and connected to your vision.

It may also be helpful to encourage staff to focus on the 'now' aspect of your narrative, so that any future changes start from a strong sense of capability in the present. You can use a [SWOT analysis template](#) to help you assess where you are at. You can also use this [editable timeline wall chart](#) to show where you are at with your implementation.

Recognising the strengths of your programs

As you develop your change narrative, you can also identify what will continue to stay the same. For example, Pre-Prep programs will continue to be play-based, led by qualified teachers and be guided by the VEYLDF.

Consider the collective strengths of your service team. As you discuss how your team plans to maintain the strengths of your service, stay alert to opportunities to build on these as you expand your programs.

Leadership potential of your team

The implementation of changes to your programs provides opportunities for developing leadership potential amongst your team.

The knowledge and expertise of your staff is a rich resource for you as a leader, for other teachers and educators, and for families and carers. For example, do your team members have:

- any insights to share based on experience in change processes in other services
- experience of the change you are planning (e.g., working with different program models)
- strengths in communicating with families and carers, or leading small teams to achieve specific changes?

Drawing on the leadership potential within your team is an important contributor to collective creativity.

Involving staff in the change process ensures they are fully informed, recognises their professional expertise, and provides them the opportunity to demonstrate leadership. By closely involving your teaching staff, including your Educational Leader and Room Leaders, you are also developing them as future service and sector leaders.

Support is available to develop Educational Leaders through the Early Learning Leadership Forums and early childhood education leadership training.

If you are a leader and feel that you would benefit from some additional support to lead through change, it may help to:

- seek formal professional development
- join a network of peers, such as a community of practice
- explore mentoring opportunities, for example, a service leader ahead of you in the Pre-Prep implementation schedule.

The Early Learning Leadership Forums are also a great way to connect with fellow leaders and learn about how others are delivering change in early childhood education.

Resources



- [Early Learning Leadership Forums](#)
- [Early childhood education leadership training](#)



Working out your next steps

Involve your staff early in discussions about possible changes. Talk about how days will be structured – such as routines and pedagogical practice – how staff may work together, and possible changes to your programming. Provide opportunities for your team to express their ideas and be involved in decisions, where possible.



You may find it helpful to think about the scale of change by considering the following:

- *timing* of changes – when will you begin the change process and when will it conclude?
- *scope* of changes – will changes affect the whole of your service or just one part?
- *impact* of changes – what changes will individuals and families experience in their daily lives?

For example, a major change will typically take longer so you may need to break the change down into stages, but a major change may also result in a greater positive impact for children and families.

As it becomes clearer what the future looks like at your service, you may find you and your team identify challenges and opportunities, as well as some of the support and professional development required. This is a positive sign and indicates you are leading change effectively.

As you identify and work through changes, there are three key resources you should refer to:

- [policy and funding advice](#) provided by the department
- the [Kindergarten Funding Guide](#), which has funding and operational information that will be updated each year of the reforms
- the [Pre-Prep](#) website, for details on the transition to Pre-Prep in your LGA.

You can also use the information below and [‘Action plan template’](#) to help you work out your next steps.

Three-Year-Old Kindergarten

Service providers determine how many hours of funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten they deliver 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 funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten as possible. Services will be funded pro rata for the program hours delivered.

Three-Year-Old Kindergarten started in 2020 in 6 regional local government areas (LGAs). By 2029, services across the state will deliver 15 hours each week.

Pre-Prep in 2025 and 2026

Pre-Prep will start in 6 LGAs in 2025. Services will offer between 16 and 30 hours of Pre-Prep each week.

A further 12 LGAs will introduce Pre-Prep in 2026. Services will offer between 16 and 20 hours of Pre-Prep each week.

New LGAs will be added to the roll-out each year. The staged schedule allows time to grow the necessary workforce and build the infrastructure, and for services to prepare for expanded programs.

Full details around Pre-Prep in 2025 and 2026 are available on the [Pre-Prep](#) website.

Children from priority cohorts with access to Pre-Prep in 2026

Pre-Prep launches for children from priority cohorts statewide in 2026. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children, children from a refugee or asylum seeker background, or children who have had contact with Child Protection are eligible for between 16 and 25 hours per week. Children supported by Access to Early Learning to attend Three-Year-Old Kindergarten are also eligible for Pre-Prep from 2026.

While all children stand to benefit from the reforms, it is recognised these children are likely to have the most to gain from expanded programs – which is why they are prioritised for access to Pre-Prep.

Children from these cohorts are currently eligible for Early Start Kindergarten (ESK), which continues to provide eligible three-year-old children access to up to 15 hours of kindergarten. Services are encouraged to use 2025 ESK enrolments to support the transition of children from priority cohorts into Pre-Prep in 2026.

Ensure existing practices relating to privacy and the handling of confidential family details are maintained, including eligibility for Pre-Prep or ESK.

You may also consider how 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.

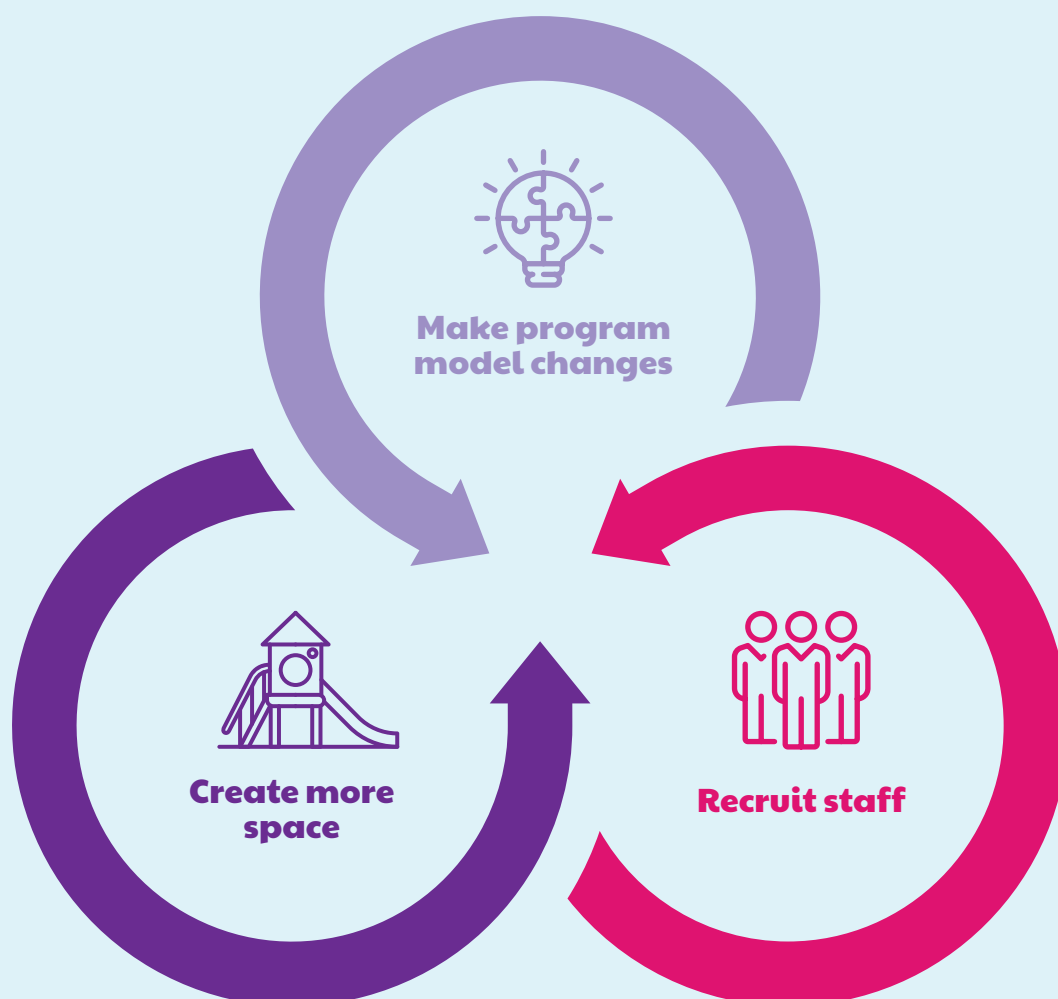
Services can use the modelling examples in the [Your Guide To information sheets](#) to get ideas on how to offer children from priority cohorts up to 25 hours of Pre-Prep from 2026. You can also contact your [local Early Childhood Improvement Branch](#) for advice.

Increasing your program hours

When working out how to transition from Four-Year-Old Kindergarten to Pre-Prep and continue Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, think about what is possible within your existing set-up to increase your hours.

See '[Making programming changes](#)' for information on different program models, including multi-age groups, rotational models, teaching longer days and team teaching. The Your Guide To information sheets have tips, ideas, and considerations about these approaches.

Look at how you can maximise your existing capacity by making programming changes, as well as considering your recruitment and infrastructure options. It may be that you use a combination of these strategies.



When you are considering how to increase your program hours, remember your local Early Childhood Improvement Branch can explore modelling, infrastructure and staffing options with you, based on the characteristics of your service.

You can also learn from and share strategies for expanding your programs through:

- your local Early Years Networks and Forums
- your Early Years Management (EYM) organisation if you are part of one
- if you are a parent-run committee of management service, you could also approach a local EYM organisation or peak body for advice.

Resources



- [Pre-Prep roll-out schedule](#)
- [Four-Year-Old Kindergarten is becoming Pre-Prep](#)



Making program modelling changes

As a starting point, consider what you can deliver within your existing set-up with your teachers and educators by implementing program modelling changes.



The most suitable model for delivering Pre-Prep hours will depend on the needs of your community. It may be useful to hear about family preferences for how kindergarten programs are delivered at your service. At the same time, you can work together with families to build their understanding of the benefits and potential opportunities that different program models offer.

When planning your programs, the following Your Guide To information sheets may help you and your team. They include advice about planning for and the benefits of particular program models, questions for reflective discussion and tips on communicating with families. You can use these to prompt ideas and discussions with your team, and you can adapt the program model examples to suit your circumstances.

[YOUR GUIDE TO: Multi-age groups](#)

[YOUR GUIDE TO: Rotational models](#)

[YOUR GUIDE TO: Team teaching](#)

[YOUR GUIDE TO: Longer days](#)

Your local Early Childhood Implementation Branch can provide more information and support about these program models. Some early childhood education peak bodies may also have support and resources available.

Managing change and maintaining quality

The change process you implement in your service should not be treated as a separate component of how you think about teaching and learning in your service. The change principles in this toolkit should complement the Practice Principles of the VEYLDF and their guidance for your work with children and families.

An important resource for planning changes and monitoring their impact is your Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). You can use your service's QIP to document your narrative of change in your service, and consider how your changes relate to the National Quality Standard. This will help you create a robust record of how these changes connect to, and support, your quality improvement efforts in your services.

Staff arrangements

It is important that you review existing staff arrangements before deciding how to staff any new or additional models. Changes in the ways teachers and educators organise their daily work across your service should be made in ways that continue to promote children's learning and development.

You may need to consider whether changes to staffing arrangements require staff consultation under the relevant industrial instrument (e.g., an enterprise agreement or award covering your service). If relevant, your peak body or industrial representative may be able to provide advice.

Resources



- [Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework \(VEYLDF\)](#)
- [Three-Year-Old teaching toolkit](#)
- [Quality Improvement Plan | ACECQA](#)
- [National Quality Standard | ACECQA](#)



Retaining and recruiting staff

Having the right people with the right skills in your service, as well as leading and supporting them in their roles, will be critical to a successful transition to Pre-Prep.

Undertaking workforce planning and thinking about attraction, recruitment, and retention to help maintain a high-quality workforce will be an important part of delivering the reforms at each service.

The Best Start, Best Life Workforce Strategy sets out the Victorian Government's priorities to grow and support the workforce now and into the future, in partnership with the sector.



Retaining your skilled staff

Workforce retention and stability have a range of important benefits including fostering consistent and trusting relationships with children and families. Effective retention can also support positive workplace culture and staff wellbeing, reduce financial costs associated with vacancies and recruitment, and aid the smooth and efficient operations of services.

The [Early Childhood Workforce Retention Guide](#) has been developed to support Victorian early childhood education and care service providers and service leaders to strengthen staff retention. This guide outlines key evidence and highlights practical strategies and practices being implemented by Victorian services to support workforce wellbeing and successfully retain their staff.

Consider how you can support the wellbeing, work satisfaction and professional development of your staff during your change process.

Staff who feel supported, valued and connected are more likely to stay with your service.

Recruiting new teachers and educators

When you need to hire staff, it is recommended you start your recruitment process early.

As well as supporting educators to upskill and encouraging people to take up a career in early childhood education, you may wish to establish connections with universities, TAFEs, secondary schools, and other training providers to help grow your future workforce. Providing quality placement experiences helps attract more students to the profession and provides you with an opportunity to assess the suitability and skills of students for your workplace.

Workforce Planning Support Grants were provided to local councils and Early Years Managers to develop Early Childhood Education Workforce Plans. Some early years peak bodies were also provided grants to deliver workforce planning resources and advice to member organisations and the sector.

The department will also continue to partner with Aboriginal communities to advance self-determination and cultural safety in early learning, and increase the number of Aboriginal educators and teachers working in services.

Supporting your workforce

Providing quality induction and support is essential to new teachers and educators who might be joining your service.

Experienced teachers and educators also play a role in sharing their expertise and knowledge with those newer to the sector. As a leader at your service, you can consider the needs of your team by including relevant professional learning and other related supports in individual professional development plans, as well as your Service Improvement Plan and your Quality Improvement Plan (QIP), as appropriate.

Remember that this support also extends to yourself, as leaders need to be well equipped to lead their staff. This means engaging in regular reflective practice to identify your own professional learning needs.

Resources



- [Early Childhood Workforce Retention Guide](#)
- [Directory of workforce programs](#)
- [Innovation Grants Program](#)
- [Recruiting new teachers and educators for the Best Start, Best Life reforms](#)
- [Recruitment kit for employers](#)
- [Quality Improvement Plan ACECQA](#)
- [Best Start, Best Life Workforce Strategy](#)



Creating more space

Funding is available for sector partners to plan, build, expand and improve early years infrastructure across Victoria. The Best Start, Best Life Infrastructure Strategy outlines the grants, programs and initiatives available.

Increasing hours may be achieved through reconfiguration and optimisation of existing space, or by extending, modifying, or building new or additional kindergarten rooms.



Local government and not-for-profit providers

If your service is part of a local government, a not-for-profit service provider, or a not-for-profit community organisation, there may be Building Blocks grants available to improve or expand your service.

If your service provider manages multiple services, you can also talk to the department about a Building Blocks Partnership if you are considering building, expanding or modernising your kindergarten to increase your capacity for Three-Year-Old Kindergarten and Pre-Prep.

These partnerships provide certainty and flexibility for long-term infrastructure development between the department and local governments or not-for-profit providers who are interested in co-investing in a pipeline of projects. Building Blocks Partnerships also offer increased funding flexibility to support solutions for more complex projects.

Investing to meet demand

To help target new infrastructure investment where and when it is needed to support the reforms, the department is engaging with local government authorities to update agreed Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plans (KISPs). You can view KISPs on the department's website.

Once updated with Pre-Prep information, KISPs will set out supply and demand for kindergarten over the life of the reforms and indicate where new infrastructure is likely to be needed for children to access a full program of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten and Pre-Prep by 2036. While a KISP is not a funding document, future investment requests through Building Blocks Grants or Partnerships need to align with the relevant KISP.

The Victorian Government is also building around 180 kindergartens on school sites, and 50 government-owned and operated Early Learning and Childcare Centres (ELCCs) in locations they are needed the most.

You can see kindergarten construction projects underway on this [interactive project map](#).

SECTOR INSIGHT Planning for renovations and expansions

A not-for-profit Early Years Management organisation managing multiple services in Melbourne, mostly on school sites, undertook planning for how its services would expand their kindergarten programs as the reforms continue.

They concluded that some services needed renovation and others needed expansion. They allowed 6 to 12 months of planning time for each service, including extensive consultation with staff and families to fully understand their needs. They worked closely with project managers, architects, and local councils, and also sought information from the Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA).

Important factors that were incorporated included:

- *accessible and inclusive design for children of all abilities*
- *zoned spaces and lighting*
- *sustainability*
- *First Nations culture*
- *outdoor spaces consisting of different mediums which embed STEM learning.*

Various renovations and expansions have been completed, including upgrades to both indoor and outdoor learning environments and the provision of modular rooms, delivered via the Victorian Government's Building Blocks initiatives.

Resources



- [Kindergarten and Infrastructure Services Plans](#)
- [Building Blocks: Best Start, Best Life Infrastructure Strategy](#)
- [Early Childhood Grants](#)
- [Kindergarten facilities and capital funding](#)
- [Kinders at schools](#)
- [50 early learning and childcare centres for Victoria](#)



Communicating with families

Your communications with families will need to be tailored to suit your service's individual circumstances. Keep families in your community informed about how many hours of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten are available, when Pre-Prep will be delivered at your service and any changes that will be made to the way programs are delivered. You can also share the benefits of 2 years of quality play-based learning for children in the years before school.



Engaging with families about Pre-Prep

Some families may need you to explain what terms like Pre-Prep or play-based learning mean, even if they have engaged with kindergarten previously. You can emphasise that programs will continue to offer play-based learning, and that many years of research show this is the best way for children to learn and grow in the early years.

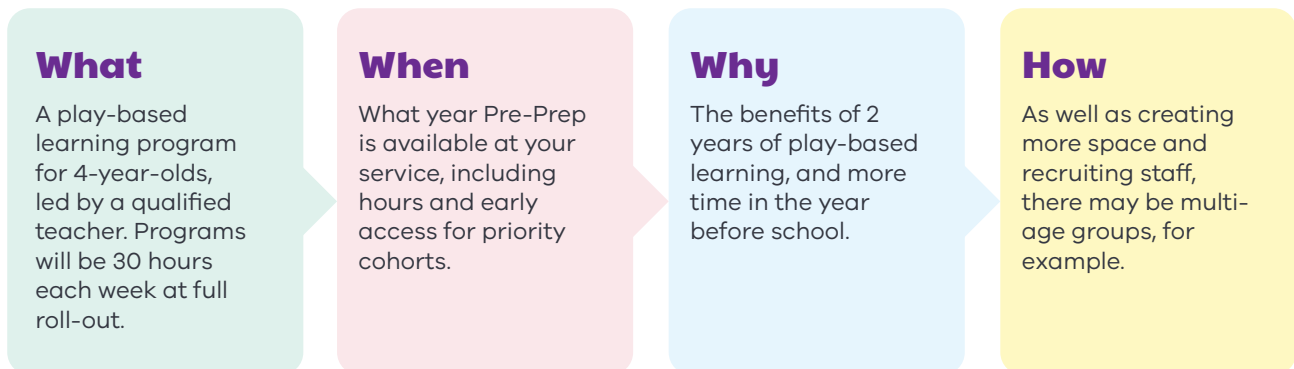
You can also give parents and carers information about any different approaches to your programs that you are implementing. This will give you the opportunity to also explain how quality play-based learning will continue to be the basis for their child's experience at your service. Having open conversations will help address any misconceptions or concerns families may have.

The [Your Guide To information sheets](#) have tips on how you can communicate different program models to assist these conversations.

Consider inviting families to ask questions and provide feedback. For example, you could hold information sessions, distribute surveys or even set up a suggestions box to allow people to provide anonymous feedback too.

Also connect with your local [Maternal Child and Health \(MCH\) service](#), playgroups, primary schools, and allied health providers. It may be helpful to get in touch each year of the reforms to relay what your service is offering so you can be sure families are receiving updated information.

You can use the figure below to help guide your conversations with families when explaining Pre-Prep.



Engaging with cultural and linguistically diverse (CALD) families

There are resources for services to communicate with CALD families about kindergarten and its benefits, including translated materials. From 2025, the department will fund 25 local councils to employ CALD outreach workers, who address barriers to kindergarten access and participation for families and children from CALD backgrounds.

To help inform families from CALD backgrounds about the changes at your service and provide opportunities to provide feedback, you can offer and promote the free telephone, video and on-site interpreting services, which are available to all department-funded kindergarten services.

Resources



- [Communicating about kindergarten to your community](#), including information about Free Kinder
- [Kindergarten quick guide for parents](#)
- [Supporting CALD families to engage in kindergarten](#), including in-language videos
- [Use an interpreter in early childhood education services](#)
- [CALD Outreach Initiative](#)
- [Information about kinder in your language](#) – families can choose from written, audio or visual materials about what children experience in kindergarten programs.

You can also order materials from the [Victorian Kindergarten Resources Portal](#) free of charge to promote your kindergarten program to your community.



Promoting Pre-Prep to priority cohort families

Children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, refugee or asylum seeker backgrounds and from families who have had contact with Child Protection services are eligible for Early Start Kindergarten (ESK), which provides eligible 3-year-old children with access to 15 hours of kindergarten.

If you have ESK enrolments at your service, and families from priority cohorts in your community, talk to them about Pre-Prep and their eligibility for it at the start of 2026.

Resources



- [Early Start Kindergarten](#)
- [Early childhood education programs supporting Aboriginal children](#), which has information about programs and services for Aboriginal children and their families. This includes the Koorie Kids Shine and the bupup balak wayipungang initiatives (previously Koorie Preschool Assistants initiative)
- [Koorie education coordinators](#), who provide information about Koorie cultural inclusion, education guidance and support
- [VAEI Koorie Early Years: Best Practice and protocols – A Practitioner’s Guide](#), which has information about providing a welcoming environment for Koorie communities at your service.
- the [Foundation House Early Years Program](#), which includes an information sheet about identifying children and families of refugee backgrounds.
- [LOOKOUT Early Childhood Learning Advisors](#) (ECLAs), who facilitate and monitor the participation of children in out-of-home care in 2 years of high-quality kindergarten
- [Access to Early Learning](#), which aims to increase participation in kindergarten for children experiencing vulnerability, and also helps children from families with complex needs to engage in a quality kindergarten program.



Appendices

Action plan

Best Start, Best Life Talking points

SWOT analysis

Timeline wall chart





Action plan (example only)

[Download here](#) or scan the QR Code

Action plan

Best Start
Best Life

Use this template to identify and plan key actions to expand your early childhood education programs. The text across the columns is sample text that you can replace with information specific to your service and circumstance.

GOAL:

Increase hours of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten to 15 hours by 2029, and start Pre-Prep in

ACTION STEP What do you need to do?	RESPONSIBLE Who at your service will make sure this happens?	START DATE	RESOURCES What can you draw on to help you?	DESIRED OUTCOME What will taking this action achieve?	END DATE
Provide information about and talk to staff about the reasons for the changes			Best Start, Best Life: Transforming early childhood education together https://www.vic.gov.au/best-start-best-life-transforming-early-childhood-education-together	Staff know what is happening and can have their say	
Set up an email for feedback and questions				Staff provide written feedback, if preferred	
Draft a vision statement, in consultation with team				Everyone works together towards shared goal	
Celebrate what has been achieved with the roll-out of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten				Staff are motivated, and know change is possible, because they have done it before	
Contact ECIB for tailored advice (e.g., workforce planning and program modelling advice)			vic.gov.au/contact-early-childhood-improvement-branch	ECIBs provide timetable options for discussion with team	
Develop workforce retention plan			Early Childhood Workforce Retention Guide	Staff feel supported and want to stay at service	
Distribute family survey				Families indicate what's important to them	
Provide details of your service delivery to the CRES administrator in your area			vic.gov.au/kindergarten-central-registration-and-enrolment	CRES information is up to date	
Get in touch with MCH			health.vic.gov.au/primary-and-community-health/maternal-and-child-health-service	MCH nurses can talk to local families about programs at your service	



Best Start, Best Life talking points

[Download here](#) or scan the QR Code

Best Start, Best Life talking points

Best Start
Best Life

Use the points below to help you communicate about the Best Start, Best Life reforms, and to answer any questions when talking to families in your community. You can use the **Early childhood language program** to get this information translated into a different language if you need (available for department-funded kindergarten services).

Best Start, Best Life reforms

- The Victorian Government's \$14 billion Best Start, Best Life reforms are the most significant change to Victoria's early childhood sector in a generation. The reforms include:
 - **Free Kinder:** Free Kinder is now available for Victorian 3- and 4-year-old children at participating services in standalone (sessional) kindergartens and long day care centres.
 - **Three-Year-Old Kindergarten:** the continued roll-out of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, with programs increasing to 15 hours a week across the state by 2029.
 - **Pre-Prep:** Four-Year-Old Kindergarten is becoming Pre-Prep with programs across Victoria increasing to 30 hours each week at full roll-out. Pre-Prep starts in 6 local government areas in 2025. Pre-Prep will be available at our service in [insert year].
 - **Early learning and childcare centres:** the establishment of 50 Victorian government-owned and operated early learning and childcare centres. These centres will be built in areas with the greatest need and will make it easier for families to access early childhood education and childcare. The first of the centres will be available in 2025.

Free Kinder

- 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.
- Families don't have to claim the savings back as services receive the funding directly from the Victorian Government.
- Families can only access a funded kindergarten program and Free Kinder offset at one service at a time.
- Free Kinder is for everyone – you don't need to be an Australian citizen to access a kindergarten program.



Best Start, Best Life talking points

[Download here](#) or scan the QR Code

Three-Year-Old Kindergarten

- Our service offers [insert number] hours of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten each week.
- Hours of delivery will increase statewide as infrastructure and workforce supply increase, with all services in Victoria delivering a 15-hour program by 2029.
- The roll-out of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten started in 2020 in 6 regional local government areas (LGAs). The roll-out of Pre-Prep will have a similar staged approach.

Pre-Prep

- Pre-Prep will start in 6 local government areas (LGAs) in 2025, before gradually rolling out across Victoria. LGAs in the 2025 roll-out include Ararat Rural City, Gannawarra Shire, Hindmarsh Shire, Murrindindi Shire, Northern Grampians Shire and Yarriambiack Shire.
- Led by qualified teachers, Pre-Prep will give 4-year-old children greater opportunities to socialise and learn through play.
- Pre-Prep will be delivered through standalone (sessional) kindergarten services and long day care centres.
- The roll-out of Pre-Prep will occur in stages, as it takes time to grow the necessary workforce and infrastructure, and for services to get ready to run expanded programs.
- In 2026, Pre-Prep becomes available across Victoria to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from a refugee or asylum seeker background, and children who have had contact with Child Protection services. Children supported by Access to Early Learning to attend Three-Year-Old Kindergarten will also be eligible.
- In 2026, 12 additional regional LGAs are also added to the roll-out schedule. In 2026, 2027 and 2028, Pre-Prep programs can be between 16 and 20 hours per week, increasing to up to 25 hours per week in 2029 and 2030, and up to 30 hours per week from 2031.
- To view the full Pre-Prep roll-out schedule, go to vic.gov.au/pre-prep.

Play-based learning

- Australian and international evidence shows that quality play-based kindergarten programs help lay the foundation for success throughout a child's education and life.
- Through play, children engage with the people, places, and objects around them to build an understanding of their world.
- Positive attitudes towards learning, such as persistence, curiosity, and imagination, are developed during play, setting children up for a lifelong love of learning.
- In early learning environments, qualified teachers and educators design and set up purposeful play-based programs that provide children with opportunities to explore, experiment, question and discover new concepts about the world in playful ways. Programs align with the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF).
- Teachers and educators play and explore with children, extending their learning through warm and engaging interactions.
- Children learn through play in many ways: physical play, dramatic play, sensory play, nature/ outdoor play, and creative play.

Why 2 years and more time matter

- The Best Start, Best Life reforms are intended to improve early learning outcomes for Victorian children through quality education programs in the 2 years before school.
- A 2-year early learning program, including more hours in the year before school, is supported by evidence from Australia and around the world.
- Studies show children who attended at least 2 years of kindergarten had:
 - better development in language, pre-reading, early number concepts, independence and concentration when starting school
 - higher exam scores, and better grades in English and maths
 - better social behaviours and self-regulation.
- Starting a quality kindergarten program at an earlier age leads to positive effects on child development. Kindergarten is a safe place for children to build skills, independence and concentration while forming positive relationships and making friends.
- Increasing the number of program hours of play-based learning in the year before school will give children even greater access to the many benefits that come with quality early childhood education.



SWOT analysis (example only)

[Download here](#) or scan the QR Code

SWOT analysis

Best Start
Best Life

Use this SWOT analysis template to get a clear picture of your top strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as you look to expand your program hours. For example, you might consider including your relationships with families and your approach to cultural inclusion or that there is an opportunity for an educator at your service to become degree-qualified as 'strengths'.

This template can help you identify the tasks you need to work on to achieve your desired change outcomes. Repeating a SWOT analysis from time to time can help you keep track of your change narrative as it progresses.

Strengths Characteristics of your service that give you an advantage	Weaknesses Characteristics of your service that place you at a disadvantage
Opportunities Elements in your environment that you could develop to your advantage	Threats Elements in your context that could create problems

Timeline wall chart (example only)

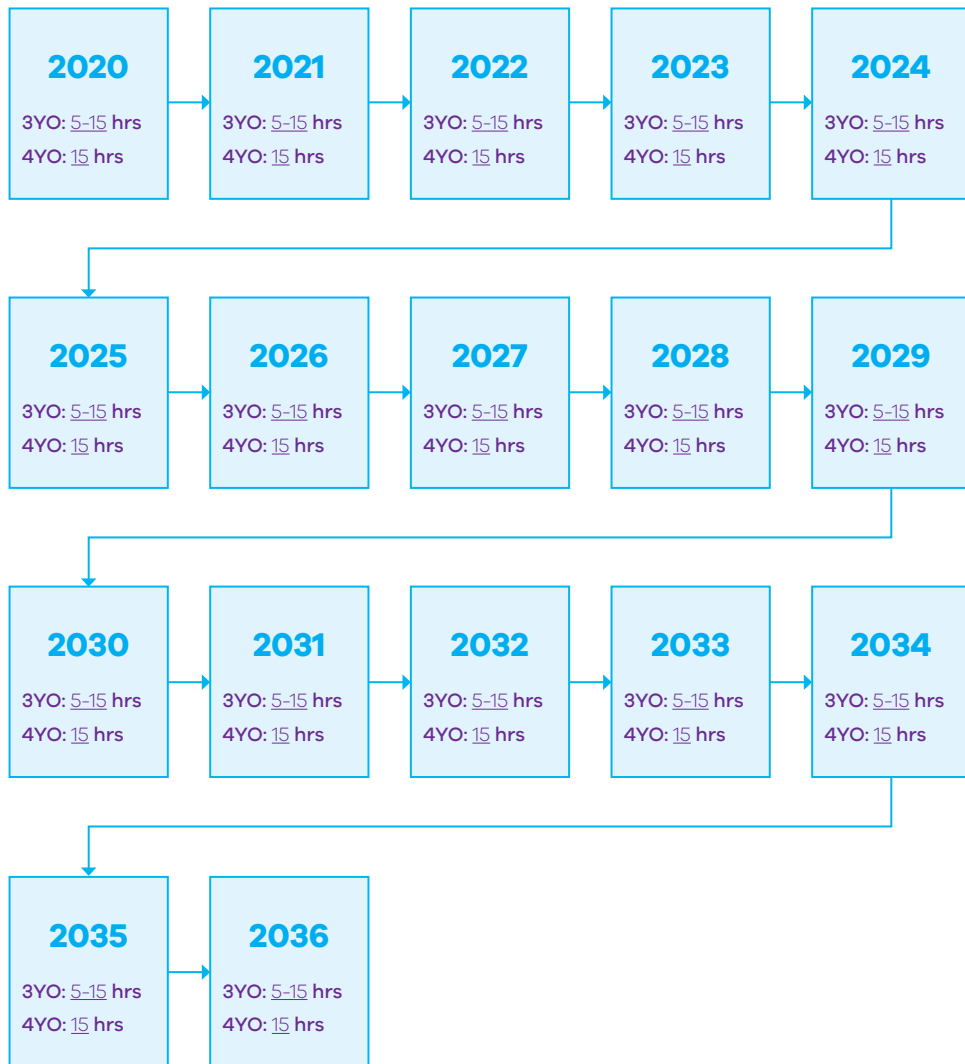
[Download here](#) or scan the QR Code



Editable timeline wall chart

**Best Start
Best Life**

Use a poster like this to show what the continued roll-out of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten and start of Pre-Prep looks like at your service.



Further information and support

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 prepare for change:

- [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.

Your feedback is important

This toolkit will be regularly updated throughout the reforms. The department welcomes your feedback, which you can share by contacting bsbl.change.management@vic.gov.au



Best Start Best Life

