

# COVID-19 FUNDING FOR SESSIONAL KINDERGARTEN SERVICES

## *Factsheet for Victorian kindergarten service providers*

In line with the most recent advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) early childhood education and care services may continue to operate at this time, with risk mitigation measures in place. The latest advice can be accessed at: <https://www.health.gov.au/news> The Department of Education and Training (the Department) will also share updated advice with the sector as it becomes available.

The Victorian Government is providing additional funding to support eligible sessional kindergarten services in recognition of the difficult situation facing these providers as a result of Coronavirus (COVID-19). Funding will be in addition to all existing Victorian Government kindergarten subsidies and payments, and will enable providers to offer a free, 15 hour per week program to all families enrolled in an eligible funded program for the duration of Term 2.

## **Is my kindergarten service eligible for this funding?**

The funding is available to not-for-profit kindergarten services delivering sessional programs. This includes community-based Early Years Managers, local government and standalone services, and government and non-government schools.

## **How much additional funding will we receive?**

Eligible services will receive additional funding of \$498 for each fee-paying enrolment.

This funding amount is based on the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS) + the KFS Ratio Supplement (total \$1,812 per annum), paid on a pro rata basis for Term 2 (11 weeks).

KFS, Early Start Kindergarten and Access to Early Learning enrolments will not attract the funding as these children are already entitled to a free 15 hour program.

Funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten enrolments in the six 2020 local government rollout areas will also attract this funding in eligible services. Where these programs are less than 15 hours, funding will be adjusted accordingly (e.g. an eligible enrolment in a 10 hour program would attract \$332 for Term 2).

## **How do I apply for this funding?**

Kindergarten services will not need to apply for this funding. The Department will calculate funding entitlements for each eligible service based on enrolments entered in the 2020 Annual Confirmation.

The Department will contact service providers directly to confirm funding amounts and each service's acceptance of requirements and conditions prior to processing payments through the Kindergarten Information Management system.

## **Do I have to accept the funding and offer a free 15 hour kindergarten program if this funding doesn't cover parent fees?**

No. Eligible kindergarten services can choose to not accept this funding and continue to charge parent fees.

## **Can we access both Commonwealth JobKeeper and this additional funding?**

Not for profit service providers that are eligible for the Commonwealth Government's 'JobKeeper' initiative due to the amount of revenue they have lost because of COVID-19 should apply for this funding. In assessing whether your organisation's revenue has

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dropped by the required amount to access this funding you need to consider all existing income streams, including Victorian Government kindergarten funding such as per capita grants and KFS etc.

It is likely that some sessional-only kindergarten providers may not be able to access JobKeeper payments because of the level of existing kindergarten funding they receive from the State. However, every provider should assess their own situation, noting the situation is likely to be different for registered charities (who have a lower threshold to receive Jobkeeper payments) and mixed providers (e.g. including long day cares and/or other non-sessional kindergarten services).

Where an eligible sessional provider offers a free 15 hour program in Term 2, and JobKeeper payments for staff employed to deliver the funded kindergarten program do not fully offset lost parent fees, the Victorian Government will 'top up' these payments through this initiative.

### What are the conditions of receiving this funding?

In order to receive the additional funding, eligible kindergarten services must complete their Annual Confirmation and confirm that they:

- will continue to provide education and care on site for all enrolled families who wish their children to attend (subject to health directives or unless otherwise agreed with the Department)
- have applied for the Commonwealth 'Jobseeker' payments where applicable, with Victorian Government funding available to 'top up' JobKeeper payments that don't fully offset parent fees
- will not charge parent fees for a 15 hour kindergarten program throughout Term 2
- will maintain pay and conditions for regular staff delivering the funded kindergarten program
- will make all reasonable efforts to maintain engagement with families and support learning in the home for enrolled

children who are not attending the service.

Further information about these conditions can be found below.

### What if my service is directed to close?

Any eligible service that has accepted the funding, and is directed to close by either the Department of Health and Human Services or the Department of Education and Training's Quality, Assessment and Regulatory Division, will retain all funding provided through this initiative, i.e. the full \$498 per child.

Eligible sessional services that have not accepted the funding and are subsequently directed to close may contact the Department to request support to cover lost parent fees and maintain staff pay and conditions.

This includes any sector wide closures or directed individual closures related to specific COVID-19 cases or risks.

### Will I receive this funding immediately?

Eligible kindergarten services will receive an immediate lump sum payment for all of Term 2 (i.e. \$498 for each 15 hour funded enrolment) following completion of their Annual Confirmation and acceptance of the conditions outlined above. This will be paid through the Kindergarten Information Management system under a special activity code (COVID – 19 Kindergarten Support).

### Can I still receive this funding if we choose to close?

This funding is only available to eligible services that continue to operate, unless directed to close by the Department of Human and Human Services or the Department's Quality Assessment and Regulatory Authority or closed in agreement with the Department.

If you are considering closing for a period of time due to extenuating circumstances, and still wish to access this funding, you should contact the Department's dedicated COVID-19 advice line on **1800 338 663**.

**Will this funding cover unpaid parent fees from Term 1?**

No. This funding is only available to cover parent fees in Term 2. Term 1 fees should be processed as normal.

**What if fees have already been paid for Term 2 – can we keep them?**

If fees have already been paid these will need to be refunded in a timely way.

Alternatively, the service can – again in a timely way – invite parents who have already paid fees to voluntarily and explicitly agree to these fees being held to apply to Term 3 or, as requested by the parents, that some or all paid fees be retained as a donation to the service.

If the service is seeking to retain fees paid to apply to Term 3 or as a donation to the service, this must be agreed in writing with families as a voluntary arrangement.

If this process is not followed, or if the parent does not agree or there is no response from the parent, the fees must be refunded in a timely way.

**Our parent fees are higher than the funding being provided, can I charge parents the difference?**

No. If services choose to accept this funding they cannot charge parents for the 15 hour kindergarten program for Term 2. Where appropriate, services can charge parents for additional hours of program delivery above 15 hours and / or wrap around care.

**Do we have to maintain all staff pay and conditions?**

Yes, all regular staff employed to deliver the 15 hour funded kindergarten program should continue to receive their normal pay and conditions. Casual staff used on an irregular basis should also be supported to the extent possible.

**What supports should be provided to children not attending the kindergarten program?**

It is important that you make all reasonable efforts to maintain contact with families whose children are not attending and support ongoing learning in the home.

The Department’s Learning from Home website provides resources and advice to support learning at home, and will continue to be updated. This can be accessed at: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/learningfromhome.aspx>

The type and frequency of contact with families will depend on each service’s individual circumstances and resources. It is understood that staff occupied with delivering the on-site program will have limited capacity to engage with other families. This is why the requirement is for all reasonable efforts only.

**Can I accept new enrolments after Term 2 has commenced?**

If there is capacity within the program, after taking into account all enrolled children including those not attending, you may enrol additional children during Term 2 with approval from the Department. You should contact the Department’s dedicated COVID-19 advice line on **1800 338 663** to discuss this and seek approval.

**Can I ‘collapse’ groups within a service because less children are attending?**

Eligible services that access this funding and provide a free program may consider different operating arrangements such as collapsing two groups that normally run separately into a single group. In considering these options service providers must ensure that parents are consulted and are not disadvantaged because of changed program hours, and that all children continue to have access to a 15 hour program (except for funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten programs that already operate for less than 15 hours).

Any decision to collapse groups should also be made with reference to the latest AHPPC advice at: <https://www.health.gov.au/news>

### **What about enrolments in unfunded three-year-old programs?**

Support will also be made available for unfunded three-year-old kindergarten programs, subject to a case by case assessment.

Service providers wishing to request this support should contact the Department at [kindergarten.funding@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:kindergarten.funding@edumail.vic.gov.au) and provide details of:

- the program hours
- number of enrolled children
- number of children currently attending
- parent fees
- staff arrangements, including salary levels.

### **How can I find out more information?**

For further information, please contact the Department's dedicated COVID-19 advice line on **1800 338 663** or email: [kindergarten.funding@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:kindergarten.funding@edumail.vic.gov.au)