

KINDERGARTEN FOR EVERY THREE-YEAR-OLD



The Victorian Government has committed almost \$5 billion over the decade to deliver universal funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten across the state. This means that an extra year of play-based learning led by a teacher is being added to Victorian children's education.

Three-Year-Old Kindergarten roll-out schedule

Due to the scale of the reform, Three-Year-Old Kindergarten is being delivered in stages, focusing first on regional and rural Victoria, where there is more likely to be existing infrastructure capacity to meet the needs of local families.

As of 2020, services in six local government areas (LGAs) are now being funded to deliver between five and 15 hours a week of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten programs.

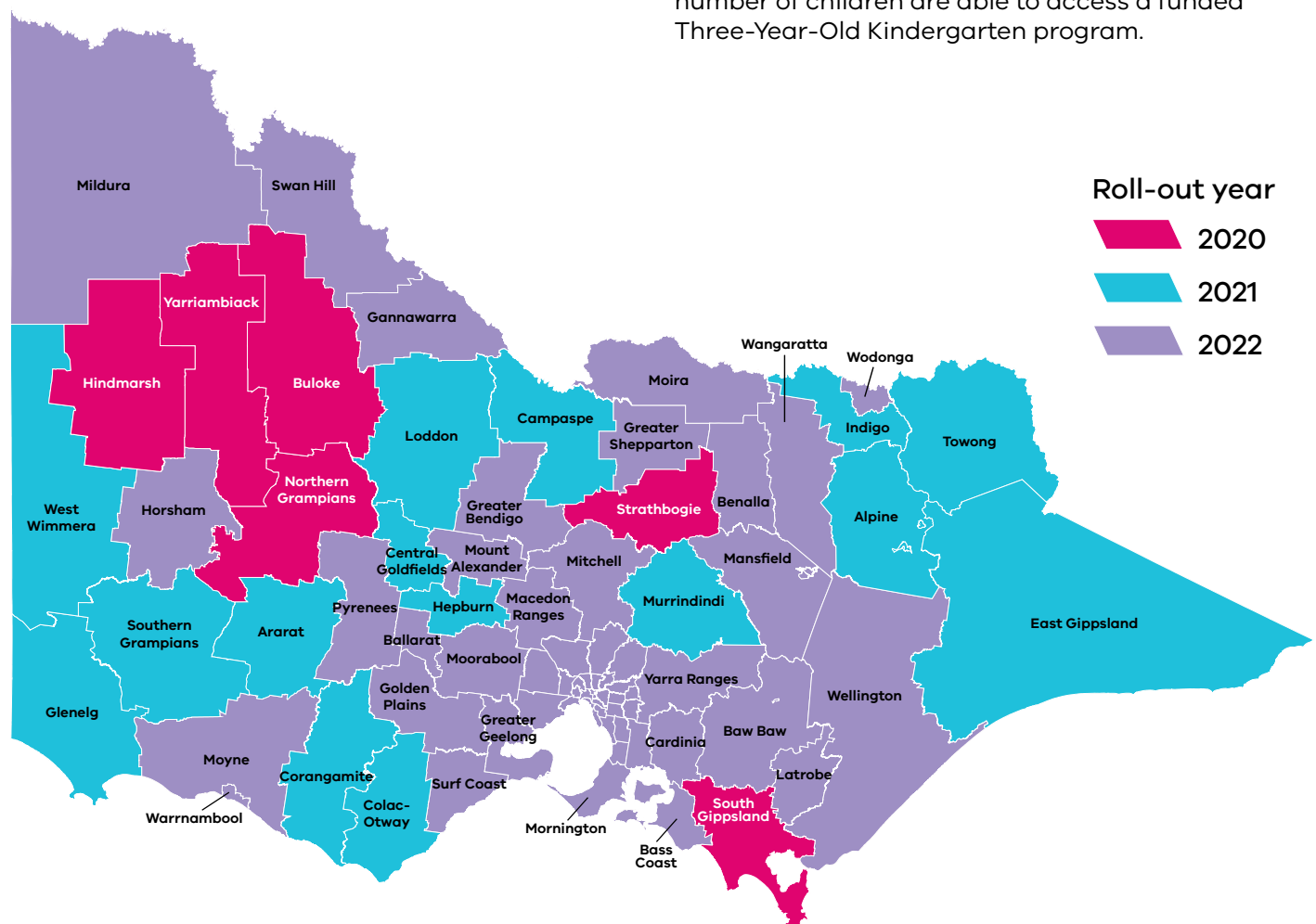
In 2021, services in a further 15 LGAs will also be funded to deliver between five and 15 hours a week of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten programs. In 2022, three-year-old children across the rest of the state will be able to access five hours a week in a kindergarten program led by a teacher. This will increase to 15 hours per week by 2029.

From 2023, it will be up to service providers to determine how many hours of funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten they deliver per week, with a minimum of five hours and a maximum of 15 hours. This choice will depend on factors like available workforce, infrastructure, capacity and community preferences.

This tailored approach to delivering funded universal Three-Year-Old Kindergarten will:

- provide families with greater access to more hours earlier in the roll-out schedule, which will have the best impact on children's learning and development
- allow providers to be more responsive to the varied needs of communities across the state
- create more certainty to support long term infrastructure planning.

The Department of Education and Training (the Department) will continue to work with providers, LGAs and peak bodies to support them through the transition, and to make sure the greatest possible number of children are able to access a funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program.





Early success of the reform

The Department is working with services and providers to make sure the greatest possible number of children are able to access a funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program. More than 600 children across the first roll-out areas are now benefiting from up to 15 hours each week of funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten. The participation rate in these areas has increased almost threefold: from 30 per cent for unfunded programs in 2019 to 80 per cent for funded programs in 2020.

While the first stage of the reform in 2020 areas has been successful, the approach to implementation must grow and adapt as the scale, size and complexity of the reform increases. Close and collaborative partnerships between Government, service providers, Early Years Managers, local councils, unions and peak bodies were an integral part of implementation in 2020 roll-out areas and will continue to be critically important to ensure success of the reform across the roll-out period.

Supporting and developing the early childhood workforce

Teachers and educators are the backbone of this reform. The Victorian Government is investing \$92.4 million over five years to create more than 6,000 new early childhood teaching jobs, including 4,000 teachers and 2,000 educators, and to provide support and professional learning for existing workers.

Financial support for studying, upskilling and teaching

Financial support is available to people who are starting their study, upskilling as an educator, or already studying an early childhood teaching qualification.

Eligible recipients may receive up to \$25,000 towards a bachelor's degree or up to \$18,000 towards a postgraduate qualification to cover

costs such as course fees, study materials or living expenses. Financial support of up to \$34,000 is available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people wanting to become an early childhood teacher or educator, including those looking to upskill. Since 1 October 2018, over 1,300 scholarships have been accepted by future early childhood teachers and educators.

The Free TAFE course list now includes the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care and Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care. This means the courses are tuition fee-free for eligible students. In the period to the end of June 2020, more than 2,000 people accessed a tuition fee-free early childhood education course. Both courses were among the top five for Free TAFE commencements during this period.

Incentive payments of between \$9,000 and \$50,000 are available for qualified early childhood teachers who take up positions in kindergarten services in 2021 roll-out areas delivering Three-Year-Old Kindergarten.

More information, including eligibility criteria, can be found at:

www.education.vic.gov.au/ecscholarships

More professional support for existing teachers and educators

We recognise that the success of this reform rests on rich and supportive interaction between educators and children. The Victorian Government is supporting practitioners to deliver quality educational programs, including through professional learning opportunities, and access to tools, resources and supports to strengthen day-to-day practice.

This includes a Teaching Toolkit for early childhood teaching teams in the roll-out of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten. The Toolkit comprises a box of evidence-informed educational resources, professional learning and online content that will support professionals as they teach to the unique

learning and developmental needs of three-year-old children. The educational resources should be used in conjunction with the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF), the approved learning and development framework for professionals working with children aged from birth to eight years.

Funding is available to kindergarten services to support provisionally registered teachers to work with a mentor to become fully registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching. The funding can be used flexibly to cover backfill and other professional learning opportunities that will support them through the registration process. Beginning teacher conferences are also being held to further support graduate teachers at the start of their careers.

From 2020, early childhood leaders, teachers and educators will have access to a regular ongoing platform for engaging with each other and with the Department. Early Learning Leadership Forums and Early Years Networks are regular events that are designed to support the implementation of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten and other important early childhood reforms. These complementary initiatives will establish collaborative learning communities across the state for the first time, and will play a significant role in achieving excellence and building a world-class early childhood education system.

The existing successful Kindergarten Quality Improvement Program (KQIP) is being expanded to improve service quality. KQIP improves the quality of kindergarten program delivery through intensive coaching, training, ongoing monitoring and peer support for educators and leaders.

Supporting staff and providers with implementation

We understand that this reform is a significant and sustained change for kindergarten service providers and staff, and we are working hard to support them. The Department has significantly increased the number of early childhood specialist staff in regional offices, with new Early Childhood Improvement Branches established in all 17 Department areas across the state.

These specialist staff work with early childhood staff, services and providers and provide resources and tailored advice to support the roll-out of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten.

For contact details of your Department regional office, visit: www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/Pages/regions.aspx

Supporting the new infrastructure needed to deliver Three-Year-Old Kindergarten

The Victorian Government is investing \$1.68 billion over this decade to support the building and expansion of kindergarten facilities across the state to make sure families, no matter where they live, can access local kindergarten programs. This investment is designed to complement and support investment from the sector.

The Victorian Government has released its Three-Year-Old Kindergarten Infrastructure Strategy, which outlines how this record investment in early childhood infrastructure will help to achieve the reform.

To share information and agree on supply, forecast demand and expectations about how demand growth will be accommodated over the roll-out, the Department has invited all 79 LGAs to discuss and agree on a Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plan (KISP). This process will inform future investment decisions.

Building Blocks

The Building Blocks Grants Program builds on previous Early Childhood Infrastructure grants programs and is the Victorian Government's primary investment vehicle to support existing and growing demand for Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten infrastructure.

Streams available include:

- Kindertartens on school sites
- Modular kindergarten facilities
- Capacity building grants
- Improvement grants
- Inclusion grants.



The new Building Blocks grants program is a co-contribution grants scheme and offers greater flexibility for the sector. The sector can now engage with the grants process at any time, with multiple assessment and announcement processes planned each year. LGAs and service providers will now be able to submit funding applications to the Department for the capacity building stream at any point in their planning cycles. Urgent requests can be raised with the Department at any time and future round closing dates will be communicated once agreed.

The grants program will also include new delivery options, such as access to modular buildings to potentially reduce costs, timelines and project management requirements involved with building a high-quality, purpose-built early learning facility.

The Victorian Government has also significantly increased its maximum grant co-contributions for projects that create new kindergarten places, where they are needed to meet demand for kindergarten places that cannot be satisfied by existing early childhood education infrastructure.

For more information on the Three-Year-Old Kindergarten Infrastructure Strategy, visit: www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/capitalprogram.aspx

For more information on Building Blocks grants or to apply, visit: www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/Pages/Building-Blocks.aspx

Building Blocks Partnerships

The KISP processes will be underpinned by new 'Building Blocks Partnerships'.

These are long term, in principle agreements between the Department and local councils or not-for-profit providers for co-investment in multi-site 'project pipelines'. Partnerships will build capacity for both Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten, through multiple projects over a number of years under agreed funding parameters.

Building Blocks Partnerships will be a critical means of working with large partners, particularly LGAs, to build large numbers of facilities over time. The discussions to establish these partnerships started in mid 2020.

Kindergartens on school sites

The Victorian Government will further support capacity building by investing in new kindergartens on a number of existing school sites every year from 2022.

The Victorian Government has also committed to ensuring that there is a kindergarten onsite or next door to every new government primary school that opens from 2021. The Department will continue to work with local councils through existing processes to make sure this commitment is supported by effective planning.

Co-locating new kindergartens with primary schools may help reduce the burden on parents and carers, can make the transition to school smoother for some children, and will also help meet future demand for kindergarten places.

For more information visit: www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/Pages/KindergartenSchoolSites.aspx

Three-Year-Old Kindergarten policies and funding

Funding for these programs works in the same way as it does for Four-Year-Old Kindergarten, with funding provided on a per capita basis. Both sessional kindergarten services and long day care centres can be funded to deliver kindergarten programs for three-year-olds.

In 2021, funding will be provided to services offering a minimum of five hours of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten per week. Services providing between five and 15 hours of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten will receive child-level funding for every hour they deliver. For example, if a three-year-old child is enrolled in a kindergarten program for 7.5 hours per week, they will attract half of the child-level funding that a child enrolled for 15 hours would attract.

Funding rates such as Per Capita, Kindergarten Fee Subsidy and Ratio Supplement will match the rates for Four-Year-Old Kindergarten.

The Kindergarten Fee Subsidy will continue to be a part of all funded kindergarten programs for three and four-year-olds. The eligibility criteria will be the same as the current funded kindergarten programs as provided in the Kindergarten Funding Guide.

All support funding currently available to Four-Year-Old Kindergarten is on offer to support Three-Year-Old Kindergarten.

Additional funding is being supplied in line with the roll-out schedule to ensure that three-year-old children with disabilities, developmental delays or additional needs can access and meaningfully participate in kindergarten programs, including through Kindergarten Inclusion Support and additional Pre-School Field Officers.





Pre-purchased places are kindergarten places funded by the Department for vulnerable or disadvantaged children. Eligible services providing Three-Year-Old Kindergarten are able to apply for pre purchased places.

The Australian-first School Readiness Funding initiative has been extended to support both three and four-year-old children enrolled in all funded kindergarten programs, with funding allocated based on levels of educational disadvantage.

Early Start Kindergarten

Early Start Kindergarten will continue to provide 15 hours a week of funded kindergarten for all eligible children up until 2029, when three-year-old children across the state will have access to 15 hours.

It is important to continue enrolling any eligible child in Early Start Kindergarten, even if a funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program is available at the service. This guarantees that children experiencing vulnerability will continue to be enrolled in the full 15 hours of kindergarten in all service settings, including long day care. It also ensures that service providers can continue to receive all funding entitlements.

Service providers are expected to continue to provide the full 15 hours funded through Early Start Kindergarten, even in instances where three-year-old groups are being offered fewer than 15 hours. Applications can be submitted through the Kindergarten Information Management (KIM) system.

Three-Year-Old Kindergarten and Base Rural Funding

All rural services will receive base funding if their total three and four-year-old enrolments are below 18 equivalent enrolments for 15 hours per week.

Services will receive child-level funding for every hour they deliver. For example, if three-year-old children are enrolled in a kindergarten program for 7.5 hours per week, two children will make up one equivalent enrolment.

If three-year-old children are enrolled for five hours of kindergarten per week, three children would make up one equivalent enrolment. Each enrolment over 18 equivalent enrolments will receive per capita funding at the rural rate.

Children's starting ages

Services can work with families of children born between January and April to decide whether to enrol their children in the year they turn three, or the following year. These decisions will be up to individual families. Factors that might be taken into consideration include the individual child's developmental and learning levels, family circumstances and preferred school starting age.

Under the National Quality Framework, the minimum educator to child ratio for children under three years of age is 1:4, while for children three years of age and older the ratio is 1:11. Children under three will not be able to attend a funded kindergarten program until they turn three, unless the service has sufficient staff to cover the required ratios.

Where children do not attend from the beginning of the kindergarten year because they turn three between January and April, services must waive parent fees for this period. If a deposit is charged, it must be offset against fees once the child commences kindergarten. Service providers are strongly encouraged to waive any deposits for families experiencing vulnerability. Services will receive a full year of child-level kindergarten program subsidy for enrolled children who do not attend until they turn three.

Priority of Access guidelines

The Department's Priority of Access guidelines are an important way to ensure that kindergarten programs are available to those children who stand to benefit the most from attending.

Services must first apply the Department's Priority of Access criteria and, following this, they may then apply locally developed criteria.

In mixed-age groups, the Priority of Access guidelines equally prioritise three and four-year-old children considered vulnerable under the policy. Where programs for three and four-year-olds are provided separately, the Priority of Access criteria are applied separately for each age cohort.

In addition, eligible children residing within the early roll-out LGAs will be prioritised for access to Three-Year-Old Kindergarten in those areas. This means that these children must be allocated a kindergarten place before applications from families living outside the LGA are considered.

Staff from the Department will be able to offer advice and support to services in working through these guidelines to make sure children are able to access quality kindergarten programs.

Contact your Department regional office for assistance.

Funding an additional year of kindergarten

Children accessing Three-Year-Old Kindergarten will transition to Four-Year-Old Kindergarten the following year.

Children meeting the criteria for a second year of Four-Year-Old Kindergarten (when a child shows delays in at least two key outcomes of learning and development) will be eligible to access one additional year of kindergarten prior to starting school.

More information

For contact details of your Department regional office, visit www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/Pages/regions.aspx

You can also visit www.vic.gov.au/kinder
www.education.vic.gov.au/3YOkinder
or email: 3YO.kindergarten@education.vic.gov.au



