

THREE-YEAR-OLD KINDERGARTEN SECTOR GUIDE

The Victorian Government has committed almost \$5 billion over a 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

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 2021, services in 21 local government areas (LGAs) are now being funded to deliver up to 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 (DET) will continue to work with providers, LGAs and peak bodies to support them through the transition, and to support the greatest possible number of children to access a funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program.

Early success of the reform

More than 2,000 children across the 21 roll-out LGAs are now benefitting from up to 15 hours each week of funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten. The participation rate in these areas increased from 30 per cent for unfunded programs in 2019 to more than 80 per cent for funded programs in 2021.

While the first stages of the reform in 2020 and 2021 areas have been successful, the approach to implementation must grow and adapt as the scale and complexity of the reform increases.

Partnerships between government, service providers, Early Years Managers, local councils, unions and peak bodies were an integral part of implementation in early roll-out areas and will continue to be critically important to support the success of the reform across the roll-out period.

Supporting and developing the early childhood workforce

Teachers and educators are an essential part of the Three-Year-Old Kindergarten reform. The Victorian Government is investing \$120.9 million over six 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 the existing workforce.

With implementation happening across the state in 2022, we encourage service providers to plan their staffing needs and any recruitment required early in 2021, to ensure that they are ready to deliver a funded program next year. This includes considering how any unused capacity within your existing service(s) could provide more children access where it is available, such as offering additional programs; operating with larger groups and a third educator; and/or introducing mixed-age group approaches or rotational models. There will be more information available about supporting recruitment in coming months available at <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/Pages/running-three-year-old-kinder.aspx>

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. More information, including eligibility criteria, can be found at: www.education.vic.gov.au/ecscholarships.

The Victorian Government has also launched a new opportunity for early childhood educators to undertake an accelerated Bachelor of Early Childhood Education, with generous financial and student supports available. This accelerated program will help high-performing educators to become fully qualified early childhood teachers from mid-2022. While all positions for this program in 2021 have been filled, those who are interested in being part of the 2022 cohort can contact Deakin University on 1800 693 888 or myfuture@deakin.edu.au, or visit <https://www.vic.gov.au/your-fast-track-becoming-early-childhood-teacher>

The Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care and Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care are available as part of Free TAFE. This means the courses are tuition fee-free for eligible students. More information can be found at: <https://www.vic.gov.au/free-tafe>

More professional support for existing teachers and educators

We recognise that the success of this reform rests on high-quality interactions between educators and children, as part of their kindergarten program. 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. Professional learning opportunities commenced from Term 1, 2020, with a range of opportunities available to engage with these supports throughout 2021 and beyond. For more information, visit <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/learning/Pages/three-year-old-toolkit.aspx>

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 2021, early childhood leaders, teachers and educators will have access to a regular ongoing platform for engaging with each other and the Department. Last year, the Early Learning Leadership Forums provided guidance for services implementing Three-Year-Old Kindergarten programs in the first 21 LGAs. For this year, a total of 21 Forums will be held over the course of the year, with four regional based Forums taking place in May, and a second round of 17 Area based Forums that will be rolled out in September. Additionally, Early Years Learning Networks, start in March 2021 for all services offering a funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program and then across the rest of Victoria from April.

These complementary initiatives will help develop collaborative learning communities across the state, and play a significant role in sharing best practice, achieving excellence and building a world-class early childhood education system.

Supporting staff and providers with implementation

We understand that this reform is a significant and sustained change for service providers and staff. The Department has 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 the decade of the reform's roll out to support the building and expansion of kindergarten facilities across the state to support families, no matter where they live, to 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, *Building Blocks*, which outlines how this record investment in early childhood infrastructure will help to achieve the reform. Building Blocks consists of three programs via which investment in infrastructure will be made:

- Building Blocks Grants
- Kindergartens on School Sites
- Modular Kindergarten Facilities.

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 commenced discussions with all 79 LGAs to discuss and agree on a Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plan (KISP). Agreed KISPs will be published so all sector partners can see the information about their areas of interest. This process will inform future investment decisions in the provision of kindergarten infrastructure.

For more information on the Three-Year-Old Kindergarten Infrastructure Strategy, and the published KISPs visit:

www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/capitalprogram.aspx

Building Blocks Partnerships

Building Blocks Partnerships are long-term, in-principle agreements between DET and LGAs or not-for-profit providers to co-invest in multi-site 'project pipelines'.

Partnerships will consider demand 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.

Kindergartens on school sites

The Victorian Government has 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

Building Blocks Grants Program

The Building Blocks Grants Program brings together new and existing grant streams into one integrated grants program, replacing the Children's Facilities Capital and Inclusive Kindergartens Facilities programs. The Building Blocks Grant Program is the Victorian Government's primary investment vehicle to support demand for Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten infrastructure. Streams available include:

- Capacity building grants
- Improvement grants
- Inclusion grants.

The Building Blocks Capacity Building stream is a co-contribution model and offers greater flexibility for the sector than has previously been available.

The Victorian Government has significantly increased its maximum grant co-contributions for projects that create new kindergarten places to meet demand.

- The sector can now engage with the grants process at any time, with multiple assessment and announcement processes planned each year. Urgent requests can be raised with the Department at any time.
- The grants program includes new delivery options, such as access to modular kindergarten facilities to potentially reduce costs, timelines and project management requirements.

The Inclusion and Improvement grants streams will open annually and offer the sector the opportunity to apply for grants to improve the condition of existing kindergarten facilities and create accessible kindergarten environments for children of all abilities.

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

Three-Year-Old Kindergarten policies and funding

Services in the 58 local government areas (LGAs) rolling out Three-Year-Old Kindergarten in 2022 will be funded for five hours of kindergarten per week, noting that the Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) program funding will continue.

Providers that have services in the 2020 and 2021 roll-out LGAs will continue to be funded to deliver between five and 15 hours. These providers should continue to prioritise access to children residing in those LGAs. Consistent with Four-Year-Old Kindergarten, children are not able to access a funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten place at more than one service.

In 2022 roll-out areas, service providers may offer additional unfunded hours. However, the priority is to give Victorian children access to five hours of funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten in 2022.

Services are required to apply the Department of Education and Training's Priority of Access (PoA) criteria to prioritise specified cohorts of children, whether or not more than the funded five hours are delivered. This helps to ensure that children who are vulnerable, disadvantaged or who have a disability are supported to access a funded kindergarten program.

Funding rates such as Per Capita, Kindergarten Fee Subsidy and Ratio Supplement will match the rates for Four-Year-Old Kindergarten, with services delivering less than 15 hours to be funded on a pro-rated basis. For example, a kindergarten in a 2022 roll-out area delivering a five hour Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program will receive one third of the applicable rate of funding available. 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.

Funding rates for 2022 will be available later in the year. DET will advise you of these updates as soon as they are available. More information will be made available, visit:

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/kinderfundrates.aspx>

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 School Readiness Funding initiative will apply 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 free or low-cost kindergarten per week to all eligible children, in all areas across Victoria, from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds, or those known to Child Protection.

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 ensure children eligible for ESK continue to be enrolled for the full 15 hours of funded kindergarten. Children

accessing ESK can be enrolled in a three-year-old group, a four-year-old group, a mixed-age group or a combination of groups in order to access 15 hours of kindergarten.

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

Under the National Quality Framework, the minimum educator to child ratio for children under three is 1:4. For children over three years of age the ratio is 1:11. For services that can cover the required ratios for children under three years old, these children will be able to attend.

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. Families should be encouraged to talk to your service's kindergarten teachers and other early childhood professionals such as Maternal Child Health nurses to help inform their decision. Children under three will not be able to attend a funded kindergarten program until their third birthday, unless the service has sufficient staff to cover the required ratios.

In circumstances where children are not given access to the program from the beginning of the kindergarten year because they are not yet three years old, fees cannot be charged by a service for the period for which the child cannot attend. Where an enrolment deposit is charged by a service, this should be netted off the fees that apply once the child starts attending. The department will provide services with 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 Priority of Access (PoA) criteria require funded kindergarten services to prioritise specified cohorts of children where there is a higher demand than places available. This helps to ensure that children who are vulnerable, disadvantaged or who have a disability are supported to access a kindergarten place.

To ensure equity for both three and four-year-old children with the introduction of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, the PoA criteria include:

- services with separate three and four-year-old groups will be required to apply the PoA policy to each age cohort separately; and
- in mixed-age groups, three and four-year-old children considered vulnerable under the policy are equally prioritised.

As outlined above, children who are eligible for ESK funding continue to have Priority of Access to a place in a 15-hour-a-week kindergarten program, regardless of where they live.

Providers that have services in the 2020 and 2021 roll-out LGAs should continue to prioritise access to children residing in those LGAs before applications from families outside the LGA are considered.

Once all PoA children have been accommodated, local criteria can be applied to prioritise children such as those enrolled from a previous year, those with a sibling in the service and/or those living closest to the service.

You can find the Priority of Access guidelines at:

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/Priority-of-Access-Criteria.aspx>

Early Years Management

Eligible Early Years Management (EYM) organisations will receive a further \$72 per three-year-old enrolment in EYM-managed sessional kindergarten services to help with the additional costs involved in delivering high-quality kindergarten programs for three-year-old children. The per enrolment funding amount does not change based on the number of hours the kindergarten program is operating.

Funding an additional year of kindergarten

Currently, children in Four-Year-Old Kindergarten program who have developmental delays in two or more key areas of development and would benefit from a second year of kindergarten will be eligible to access a second year of funded kindergarten following an assessment by an early childhood teacher.

All children in Three-Year-Old Kindergarten will be expected to transition to Four-Year-Old kindergarten in the following year. A funded second year of kindergarten will only be available for children in the Four-Year-Old program who meet the above criteria.

Victoria's new Kinder Tick

The Kinder Tick is a new and valuable tool for Victorian parents and carers, who need to navigate a lot of information when it comes time to enrol their child in a kindergarten program. All services that deliver a funded kindergarten program are eligible to use the Kinder Tick. Wherever they see the Kinder Tick, Victorian families can be confident that:

- the program will be led by a qualified teacher
- their children will benefit from play-based learning, and
- the program meets government guidelines and complies with the National Quality Framework.

DET has provided the tools to implement and promote the Kinder Tick to all services with a funded kindergarten program state-wide, including a physical signage pack and a digital communications pack to help them talk to their communities about what the Kinder Tick means.

The Kinder Tick is not a new accreditation. It does not act as a 'rating' system—the existing independent process for assessment and rating will continue and remains separate. Use of the Kinder Tick is not linked to other Victorian Government initiatives such as Free Kinder. The Kinder Tick simply tells parents that an approved kindergarten program is available at each service displaying it, making clear all the available kinder options for their family. For more information and for resources visit: www.education.vic.gov.au/kinder-tick-info

Free Kinder in 2021

Kindergarten programs for four-year-olds and eligible three-year-old children in participating services Victorian Government funded services are free in 2021. Free Kinder forms part of the economic recovery support for Victorians as we recover from the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The initiative is for 2021 only.

This investment is saving families around \$2,000 for each child enrolled in a participating funded kindergarten program in 2021. This is in addition to all regular Victorian Government kindergarten funding and the roll-out of universal, funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten.

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
- <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/Pages/running-three-year-old-kinder.aspx>

Or email:

- 3YO.kindergarten@education.vic.gov.au