

FEES POLICY

Mandatory – Quality Area 7

Important note: A pandemic is an epidemic of an infectious disease that has spread across a large region, for instance multiple continents or worldwide, affecting a substantial number of people. BCYF advises that the contents of this policy are relevant to a pandemic event. In considering what actions are required by BCYF as an Approved Provider, information and guidance provided by the, Victorian Government, the Department of Health and Human Resources, the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, the Department of Education and Training (DET) should be followed and adhered to.

PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- the setting, payment and collection of fees within BCYF (Barwon Child, Youth & Family) Education and Care Services.
- ensuring the viability of BCYF Education and Care services, by setting appropriate fees and charges
- the equitable and non-discriminatory application of fees across the programs provided by BCYF Education and Care services.

POLICY STATEMENT

1. VALUES

BCYF is committed to:

- providing responsible financial management of the service, including establishing fees that will result in a financially viable service, while keeping user fees at the lowest possible level;
- providing a fair and manageable system for dealing with non-payment and/or inability to pay fees/outstanding debts;
- ensuring there are no financial barriers for families wishing to access an early childhood program for their child/children;
- maintaining confidentiality in relation to the financial circumstances of parents/guardians;
- advising users of the service about program funding, including government support and fees to be paid by parents/guardians;
- providing equitable access for families eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy; and
- ensuring that BCYF complies with the Australian Government requirements to be an approved Education and Care Service for the purposes of Child Care Subsidy in the Early Learning Centres.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to the Approved Provider, Person with Management and Control, Nominated Supervisor, Person in Day-to-Day Charge, educators and parents/guardians with an enrolled child, or who wish to enrol a child at BCYF.

3. BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

Kindergarten

The Department of Education and Training (DET) provides funding for each child who is enrolled and attending a subsidised kindergarten program in the two years before school in Colac Otway Shire and one year before school in the Barwon Region. Income from other sources, primarily fees, is required to meet all the additional costs incurred by the service in the delivery of the children's program. In addition, the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (refer to *Definitions*) enables eligible children to attend a funded kindergarten program free of charge in the two years before school in Colac Otway Shire and one year

before school in the Barwon region. DET also funds Early Start Kindergarten for three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection, to access kindergarten programs as outlined in The Kindergarten Funding Guide (refer to Sources).

DET requires that funded services have a comprehensive written fees policy, and the content of this policy must be communicated to families. The policy must include a written statement about the fees to be charged, as required under Regulation 168(2) (n), and the payment process. All families must be informed of applicable term and annual fees at the time of enrolment. Services must also advise eligible families of the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy arrangements. The fees charged must comply with the *Kindergarten Fee Subsidy – Fees Policy* (refer to *Definitions*), and be responsive to the local community and the viability of the service. *The Kindergarten Funding Guide* (refer to *Sources*) outlines the criteria to be covered in the policy.

BCYF develops a budget process which sets fees each year, taking into consideration:

1. the financial viability of the service
2. the level of government funding for the program including the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy and Child Care Subsidy
3. the availability of other income sources, such as grants
4. the fees charged by similar services in the area
5. the capacity of parents/guardians to pay fees
6. reasonable expenditures in meeting agreed program quality and standards
7. requirements of the Kindergarten Funding Guide (Department of Education and Training) available from the DET website: www.education.vic.gov.au
8. requirement of the Family Assistance Law (Department of Education and Training) available from the DET website: www.education.vic.gov.au

Early Learning Centres

Education and Care services providing long day care are not funded to provide childcare. Families are provided assistance to pay fees through the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) scheme. Child Care Subsidy is an Australian government payment that can assist eligible families to reduce the cost of childcare at an approved service. Child Care Subsidy scheme is paid directly to the provider to reduce the fees.

For more information visit:

<https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/child-care-subsidy>

Legislation and standards

Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006* (Vic)
- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic)
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth)
- *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010*
- *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011: Regulation 168(2)(n)*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 1995* (Vic)
- *Child Care Provider Handbook 2018* (Department of Education and Training)
- *A New Tax System (family Assistance) (Administration) Act 2000*
- *National Quality Standard*, including Quality Area 7: Governance and Leadership

4. DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For commonly used terms e.g. Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, Regulatory Authority etc. refer to the *Guide to the National Quality Framework*: acecqa.gov.au/files/National-Quality-Framework-Resources-Kit/NQF-Resource-03-Guide-to-NQS.pdf

Approved care: Approved child care services, such as long day care have been approved by the Australian Government to pass on Child Care Subsidy as a reduction in child care fees

Approved Provider and Person with Management and Control are responsible: Approved provider and Person with Management and Control is an organization and/or individual that has completed an application form and been approved by the Regulatory Authority as fit and proper to operate one or more education and care services. BCYF has nominated the Director of Early Years and the Manager of Early Years Education & Community (EYEC) as people with Management and Control responsibility.

Child Care Subsidy (CCS): A Commonwealth Government payment to help families who use either approved services or registered childcare (refer to *Definitions*). All eligible families can receive some Child Care Subsidy. Details are available at: www.humanservices.gov.au. More information about the New Child Care Package can be found at: www.education.gov.au

Early Learning Centre: A program which provides long day care for children from 0 to 6 years.

Early Start Kindergarten: A funding program that enables three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection including those in out-of-home care or children who have been referred to Child FIRST and or integrated Family Services or Services Connect to attend a kindergarten program that is planned and delivered by an early childhood teacher for up to 15 hours per week. Details are available at: www.education.vic.gov.au

Excursion/service event charge: An additional charge required to meet the cost of special events or excursions that occur in response to emerging children's program needs. Events that are planned ahead and are included as an expenditure item in the service's budget do not incur this additional charge.

Fees: A charge for a place within a program at the service.

Health Care Card: A Commonwealth Government entitlement providing concessions for low-income earners and other eligible people. Details are available at: www.humanservices.gov.au

Holding Fee – Early Learning Centre: Holding fee is charged prior to the commencement of the education and care placement. This fee will be allocated to the final two weeks of care when 14 days' notice is provided. The holding fee is calculated one week at full fee for the booked time.

Kindergarten Placement Offer deposit: A charge to secure a place that has been offered in a program at the service. This is deducted from term fees.

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS): A state government subsidy paid in addition to per capita grants to subsidise the costs of parent fees and enable eligible children to attend a funded kindergarten for 15 hours low cost or free of charge (*The Kindergarten Funding Guide* (refer to Sources)).

Kindergarten Registration fee: A payment to cover administrative costs associated with the processing of a child's kindergarten registration on the wait list excluding families who are verified as qualifying for Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS) or Early Start Kindergarten (ESK)

Late collection charge – Early Learning Centre: A charge that may be imposed by the Approved Provider when parents/guardians are late to collect their child/children from the program

5. SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

Sources

- *The Kindergarten Funding Guide* (Department of Education and Training): www.education.vic.gov.au
- *Child Care Provider Handbook 2018* (Department of Education and Training)
- *A New Tax System (family Assistance) (Administration) Act 2000*

Service policies

- *Complaints and Grievances Policy*
- *Delivery and Collection of Children Policy*
- *Enrolment and Orientation Policy*
- *Excursions and Service Events Policy*
- *Inclusion and Equity Policy*
- *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy*

6. PROCEDURES

The Approved Provider and Persons with Management and Control are responsible for: General

- reviewing the current budget to determine fee income requirements
- ensuring all fees and charges meet legislative and funding requirements of The Kindergarten Funding Guide and the Child Care Provider Handbook
- developing a fee policy that balances the parent's/guardian's capacity to pay, with providing a high-quality program and maintaining service viability
- implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with parents/guardians, the Nominated Supervisor and staff, and in line with the requirements of DET's *The Kindergarten Funding Guide*, *Child Care Provider Handbook* and the *National Quality Framework*
- considering options for payment when affordability is an issue for families
- ensuring information about fees and charges is displayed on the BCYF web site for families to view at anytime
- ensuring that the *Fees Policy* is readily accessible at the service (Regulation 171) providing all parents/guardians with fee information and policy.
- clearly communicating this policy and payment options to families in a culturally-sensitive way, and in the family's first language where possible
- notifying parents/guardians a minimum of 14 days of any proposed changes to the fees charged or the way in which the fees are collected (Regulation 172(2)), and ideally providing one term's notice.
- providing all parents/guardians with a fee payment agreement
- providing all parents/guardians with a statement of fees and charges upon enrolment of their child

- ensuring fees are collected and receipted as per the BCYF debt recovery policy
- collecting all relevant information and maintaining relevant documentation regarding those with entitlement to concessions, where applicable
- complying with the service's *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of fees
- preferred payment option for fees is via Direct Debit, Direct Deposit, EFTPOS or by arrangement approved by BCYF
- nonpayment of fees may result in the review of the child's place.

Kindergarten

- registration fee is payable at the time of registration. Families who meet the Priority of Access, Criteria 1 are not required to pay the registration fee.
- if payable, the registration fee is non-refundable
- deposit to confirm your child's enrolment payable on acceptance of place. Deposit is deducted from Term 1 fees.
- term fees will be invoiced a minimum of two weeks prior to the due date

Early Learning Centre

- a holding fee (1 week's full fee) will be charged and will be refunded on notification of the ceasing of care
- parents/guardians accessing the ELC long day care program will be provided with a Confirmation of booking
- guidelines in the Child Care Provider Handbook will be followed regarding payment of Child Care Subsidy related to absences before an enrolled child physically attends care.

CCS will not be paid if:

- eg: a child is booked to start at a service on a particular date, and does not attend that day, or a provider changes a family to reserve a place for a child who has not yet physically attended care.
- guidelines in the Child Care Provider Handbook will be followed regarding payment of Child Care Subsidy related to absences submitted after the child's last physical day of care eg: A family has confirmed their child's last day at a service, but that child does not physically attend their last booked session of care, or a provider continues to charge fees for sessions of care after a child has left the service because the family did not give the agreed period of notice that they no longer require childcare.
- all documentation pertaining to Child Care Subsidy will be kept for the specified period of time and will be made available to the Australian Government on request.
- the Approved Provider reserves the right to charge families for each child not collected from the service by the advertised closing time. The fee charged for late collection by the service is needed to recoup expenses occurred in employee overtime wages.
- fees will be invoiced fortnightly and are due within days.

The Nominated Supervisor and Person in Day-to-Day Charge is responsible for:

- assisting the Approved Provider in reviewing this policy, and ensuring that this policy is based on the requirements of DET's *The Kindergarten Funding Guide*, *Child Care Provider Handbook* and the *National Quality Framework*.
- informing the Approved Provider and Person with Management and Control of any issues regarding fees that may be a barrier to families enrolling and accessing BCYF Education and care services.
- communicating this policy, the availability of the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy and payment options to families in a culturally-sensitive way and in the family's first language where possible.
- providing all parents/guardians with access to the Fee policy.
- informing the Approved Provider, and/or the Nominated Supervisor of any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service.
- referring parents'/guardians' questions in relation to this policy to the Approved Provider.
- complying with the service's *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of fees.
- providing government funding information to parent/s guardians as required.

All other staff are responsible for:

- informing the Approved Provider, and/or the Nominated Supervisor and/or Person in Day-to-Day Charge of any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service
- referring parents'/guardians' questions in relation to this policy to the Approved Provider

Parents/guardians are responsible for:

General

- reading the BCYF Fee Policy
- signing, returning and complying with the Fee Payment Agreement
- notifying the Enrolment Officer if experiencing difficulties with the payment of fees. The Enrolment Officer will communicate with the Approved Provider all information regarding fee payment.
- notifying the Enrolment Officer/ Approved Provider in writing at least 14 days prior to ceasing care
- Dishonor fees are the responsibility of the parent/guardian
- Non payment of fees may result in a review of the child's place

Kindergarten

- providing the required documentation to enable the service to claim the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy for eligible families.
- registration fee is payable at the time of registration. Families who meet the Priority of Access, Criteria 1 are not required to pay the registration fee.
- if payable, the registration fee is non-refundable
- payment of Kindergarten fees is required by the due date.
- Full payment from the first day of Term 1 is required if a place is to be reserved for a child accessing a kindergarten program. Children can only commence a kindergarten program when they have turned three.
- To hold a place for a child who has not turned 3 by the start of Term 1, parents/guardians will need to pay a full terms fee in advance to hold the place.

Early Learning Centre

- parent/guardian accessing BCYF long day care programs must apply for Child Care Subsidy (CCS) and meet all legislative requirements as stated by the Australian government, Department of Education and Training. For more information, please visit. www.education.gov.au/ChildCarePackage
- it is the parent/guardians' responsibility to lodge a claim/activity test for Child Care Subsidy (CCS) with Centrelink or myGov
- parent/guardian will complete and sign the Confirmation of Booking parent/guardian, child enrolment form and any other additional information for Child Care Subsidy.
- parent/guardian must confirm their child's enrollment at a service through myGov before Child Care Subsidy can be approved
- parent/guardian will pay a holding fee (1 week's full fee) which will be refunded on notification of the ceasing care
- parent/guardian will only be eligible for Child Care Subsidy if child care attendance records are accurately completed
- parent/guardian are entitled to 42 absence days for each registered child each financial year. Child Care Subsidy is paid for these days provided the child would normally have attended on that day, and fees have been charged
- parent/guardian are entitled to claim additional absences after the first 42 absence days have been used and these are called "additional absence days". There is no limit on the days for which child care subsidy may be paid, as long as they are for the reasons specified in the current child care provider handbook. Supporting documentation is required for approval of additional absence days.

EYM Fees Policy Custodian: Manager Early Years Review Date: May 2021 Version No: 3

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- Parent/guardian will be unable to claim child care subsidy on the first and last day of care if their child is absent.
- Parent/guardian will pay fees within 7 days of being invoiced.

Unpaid fees

If fees are not paid by the due date, the following steps will be taken;

- where payment has not been received by the due date, BCYF staff will make contact via phone, email or mail with the parent/guardian
- where payment is still not received, families will be invited to attend a meeting with the Manager of Early Years Education & Community (EYEC) to discuss the range of support options available and establish a payment plan.
- failure to attend the meeting and continued non-payment may result in a second and final letter from the BCYF finance team in consultation with the EYEC and finance manager notifying parents/guardian that the child's place at the service may be suspended unless payment is made or a payment plan is entered into within a specified period of time. This letter will also include information on a range of support options available for the family such as Centre pay.
- If a decision is made to withdraw the child's place at the service, the parents/guardian will be notified via mail, email, phone and/or text from the EYEC manager.

Unpaid Direct debit fees:

- if a direct debit is not honored in the first instance you will be contacted by your bank.
- any dishonor fees will be the responsibility of the parent and not BCYF.
- once BCYF is made aware of a direct debit rejection, contact will be made via phone, email or mail with the parents/guardians to clarify payment arrangements.
- where payment is still not received, families will be invited to attend a meeting with the EYM manager to discuss the range of support options available and establish a payment plan.
- failure to attend the meeting and continued non-payment may result in a second and final letter from the BCYF finances team in consultation with the EYM manager and manager notifying parents/guardians that the child's place at the service may be suspended unless payment is made or a payment plan is entered into within a specified period of time. This letter will also include information on a range of support options available for the family such as Centre pay.
- BCYF will continue to offer support and will reserve the right to employ the services of a debt collector and any costs incurred will be charged back to the parent/guardians.
- if a decision is made to withdraw the child's place at the service, the parents/guardians will be notified via mail, email, phone and text from the EYM manager.

BCYF will continue to offer support and will reserve the right to employ the services of a debt collector and any costs incurred will be charged back to the parent/guardian.

Any outstanding debt payable to BCYF must be cleared or an agreed payment plan entered into prior to a child enrolling and/ or being accepted into another BCYF EYM program.

Refund of fees

In any other case, fees are non-refundable (exceptional circumstances may apply – these are at the discretion of BCYF.) There will be no refund of fees in the following circumstances:

- a child's short-term illness
- public holidays
- family holiday during operational times
- closure of the service for one or more days when a qualified educator is absent and a qualified reliever is not available

- closure of the service for staff training days
- closure of the service due to extreme and unavoidable circumstances
- family decision to withdraw part way through term
- there will be no refund where a family chooses not to send their child to the program for the maximum number of hours for which they are enrolled.

Refund of fees – Kindergarten:

If a family becomes eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy during a term, a full refund of the applicable term fees (and fee deposit, where appropriate) will be provided. Fees may still apply for programs offering more than the required minimum hours per week.

7. EVALUATION

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the Approved Provider will:

- regularly seek feedback from everyone affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness, particularly in relation to affordability, flexibility of payment options and procedures for the collection of fees
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy
- monitor the number of families/children excluded from the service because of their inability to pay fees
- keep the policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy and best practice
- revise the policy and procedures as part of the service's policy review cycle, or as required
- notify parents/guardians at least 14 days before making any changes to this policy or its procedures (Regulation 172(2)) unless a lesser period is necessary because of a risk

ATTACHMENTS

Nil

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the Approved Provider of Barwon Child, Youth & Family on 6 October 2020.

REVIEW DATE: May 2021