

Early Learning Fee Policy

Policy Statement

Uniting Early Learning is committed to:

- Supporting the Victorian Government’s Free Kindergarten initiative
- Increasing access to quality early learning services for all Victorian and Tasmanian children
- Providing responsible financial management of services, including establishing fees that will result in a financially viable service, while keeping user fees at the lowest possible level
- Ensuring parents are informed of applicable fees in childcare and providing invoices in a timely manner, with a clear payment schedule
- Providing a fair and manageable system for dealing with non-payment and/or inability to pay fees/outstanding debts in childcare
- Advising users of childcare services about program funding, including government support and fees to be paid by parents
- Working with families enrolled in childcare who are experiencing financial barriers to accessing an early childhood program
- Maintaining confidentiality in relation to the financial circumstances of parents
- Providing equitable access for families eligible for Government subsidies.

Executive Summary

Uniting is a not-for-profit community organisation committed to working with the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our communities. Fees charged by Uniting Early Learning for families using childcare services, go towards the operational costs of program delivery to ensure the service remains viable. Any income generated is used to further the mission of the organisation and will not be for individual gain. Fee levels are set by the Approved Provider each year on completion of an annual budget to enable services to provide quality education and care and fulfil service and funding agreements. Application of fees across the programs provided by Uniting Early Learning will be equitable and non-discriminatory and be attuned to minimise financial barriers to access services.

The fee schedule, payment and collection arrangements for families attending childcare services will be documented and explained to families before or during the enrolment process and a schedule of fees and/or a *Complying written arrangement (CWA)* (refer to *Attachment 14b*) will be provided at this time. To accommodate families’ cultural backgrounds, an interpreter may be required to minimise communication barriers and maximise understanding of the roles and responsibilities of all parties.

Fees will be reviewed with 14 days’ notice of any change provided to families.

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER		FEE POLICY		
Content Owner	General Manager Early Learning			Page 1 of 10
Document Author	Senior Manager EL Quality & Education	Document Version	V 7.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	14/11/2023	Revision Due Date	05/10/2024	

Current Environmental Context

The Best Start, Best Life reform will help all Victorian children dream even bigger through increased access to quality early childhood education and care. A critical part of the reform is Free Kindergarten, which will support access to two years of high-quality kindergarten programs for all Victorian children by making this free.

Free Kindergarten will be available for both 3 and 4-year-old kindergarten programs from 2023.

- Providing a free 15-hour program to four-year-old children enrolled at a sessional service
- Providing a free 15-hour program to three-year-old children enrolled at a sessional service
- Offsetting the funded kindergarten program component of parent fees for three and four-year-old children enrolled at a long day care service.

Uniting Victoria and Tasmania has opted into the Free Kindergarten program.

All children enrolled in a funded kindergarten program at a participating service are eligible for Free Kinder from 2023. In line with existing policies for per capita funding, children must only receive Free Kindergarten funding at one service. If a child attends more than one service that offers a funded kindergarten program (e.g. a sessional service for some days and a long day care service on other days), the family must nominate which service they will receive their free funded kindergarten program.

The Australian Government 's commitment to reduce child care costs for Australian families.

The changes will:

- Support parents' and carers' choice to increase their workforce participation, particularly women
- Make early childhood education and care more affordable for more families
- Extend to more children the benefits early childhood education and care brings to children's school-readiness and long-term outcomes.

Under the changes, out-of-pocket costs will reduce for around 96% of families currently using child care. No families will be worse off.

From July 2023, Child Care Subsidy rates will increase up to 90 per cent for eligible families earning less than \$530,000. Families will continue to receive existing higher subsidy rates of up to 95 per cent for any additional children in care aged 5 and under.

Child Care Subsidy period of emergency

The Australian Government Department of Education may declare a Child Care Subsidy (CCS) period of emergency in parts of Victoria or Tasmania for an event that:

- Affects a widespread area
- Has a severe impact on the lives of a significant number of people in that area, and
- Prevents children from attending a service or may make attending dangerous.

All of these conditions must apply for a CCS period of emergency to be declared.

During a period of emergency, we can waive the gap fee for families if:

- A child does not attend care
- Your service is closed as a direct result of the emergency.

Gap fee waivers do not apply for partial closures or if children have attended part of the day.

During a CCS period of emergency, families in affected regions won't have to use their annual allocation (42 days) of allowable absences.

Children who live or attend a service in an affected region will get extra allowable absences for the duration of the CCS period of emergency. These absences will be automatically applied in the Child Care Subsidy System if we declare a CCS period of emergency.

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER		FEE POLICY		
Content Owner	General Manager Early Learning			Page 2 of 10
Document Author	Senior Manager EL Quality & Education	Document Version	V 7.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	14/11/2023	Revision Due Date	05/10/2024	

The following fee schedules can be found on the Uniting SharePoint

Form14c: [Schedule of Fees – Funded kindergarten programs \(Vic only\)](#)

Form14d: [Schedule of Fee’s - Outside School Hours Care, Vacation Care and Occasional Care](#)

Form14e: [Uniting Family Day Care Client Fee Schedule](#)

Form 14f: [Statement of Fees and Charges \(Long Day Care\)](#)

Form 14.3: [Fee Payment Agreement-Late fee payment](#)

Form 14.4: [Gap Fee Waiver Application Form 14.4](#)

Form - [Child Care Subsidy \(CCS\) Cessation Agreement](#)

Reference/Sources

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- Inclusion, Diversity & Equity policy
- Delivery and Collection of Children policy
- Excursions, Regular Outings and Service Events policy
- Privacy policy
- Complaints and Grievances policy - 3
- Enrolment and Orientation policy
- Service Closure policy
- Feedback policy
- Childcare Service Handbook Department of Education and Training (Aus)
- Children’s Services Regulations 2020: Regulation
- Children’s Services amendment Act 2019
- Commonwealth and State service and funding agreements
- 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 Regulations 2011: Regulation 168(2)(n)
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
- Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic)
- Kindergarten Funding Guide, Department of Education & Training (Vic)
- A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999
- A New Tax System (Family Assistance) (Administration) Act 1999
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 (Vic)
- Child Care Subsidy Minister’s Rules 2017
- Child Care Subsidy Secretary’s Rules 2017
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
- Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Jobs for Families Child Care Package) Act 2017
- National Quality Standard, Quality Area 7: Governance and Leadership
- Tasmanian Licensing Standards for Centre Based Childcare 2014 Class 5

Authorisation

This policy was adopted by Uniting Early Learning on 14 November 2023

Amended 24th January 2024

Review

This policy is to be reviewed by 05 October 2024

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER	FEE POLICY			
Content Owner	General Manager Early Learning			Page 3 of 10
Document Author	Senior Manager EL Quality & Education	Document Version	V 7.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	14/11/2023	Revision Due Date	05/10/2024	

Responsibilities relating to the Fee Policy

Approved Provider

- Comply with the family assistance law (in particular, to reduce fees in accordance with amounts specified by the Department of Education)
- Comply with the National Law and National Regulations and/or other applicable childcare laws (for example, state or territory licensing laws)
- Comply with Australian Government childcare funding agreements
- Comply with the Kindergarten Funding Guide
- Ensure the service remains financially viable and can meet its debts and other obligations as they fall due
- Advise families of the Free Kindergarten program
- Ensure families are not charged any kindergarten compulsory out-of-pocket levies or maintenance fees (voluntary fundraising and payments/donations are permitted)
- Ensuring that children eligible for KFS are not charged for excursions or incursions
- Ensuring that any surplus kindergarten funding is used for directly supporting the quality of the teaching and learning in the kindergarten program and/or attendance at the service, including vulnerable children and families not yet enrolled
- Ensuring that any child that is eligible for Early Start Kindergarten is enrolled at the service and recorded on the KIM system
- Collecting all relevant information regarding those with entitlement to concessions and recording it on the KIM system
- Review the current budget to determine fee income requirements
- Develop a fee policy that balances the parent's capacity to pay with providing a high-quality program and maintaining service viability
- Implement and review this policy in consultation with all relevant parties, and in line with the requirements of service and funding agreements
- Ensure that this policy is based on the principles of the *Kindergarten Funding Guide*, *Fee Policy*, *Childcare Subsidy* and *Additional Childcare Subsidy Guidelines* (see *Glossary*)
- Consider any fee-related issues that may be a barrier to families enrolling at the childcare service and work to remove these wherever possible; including considering options for payment when affordability is an issue for families
- Review the number of families enrolled in childcare experiencing financial hardship and the effectiveness of the procedures for late payment and support offered
- Clearly communicate this policy and payment options to families enrolled in childcare in a culturally sensitive way, and in the family's first language where possible
- Notify parents at least 14 days prior of any proposed changes to the fees charged or the way in which the fees are collected.

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER		FEE POLICY		
Content Owner	General Manager Early Learning			Page 4 of 10
Document Author	Senior Manager EL Quality & Education	Document Version	V 7.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	14/11/2023	Revision Due Date	05/10/2024	

Responsible Person

- Ensure that the *Fee Policy* is readily accessible at the service
- Provide all parents with access to a copy of the document containing fee information for families
- Provide all parents with a schedule of fees and charges upon enrolment of their child
- Provide all parents with a fee payment agreement (refer to agreements 14.1, 14.2, 14.3 & 14.4 available on the internet and intranet) or the *Complying Written Arrangement (CWA)*
- Collect all relevant information prior to child/ren's commencement and maintain relevant documentation regarding families with entitlements to concessions and subsidies, where applicable
- Comply with the *Privacy policy* regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of fees
- Ensure a notice outlining fees charged by the service is displayed prominently in the main entrance
- Consider any fee-related issues that may be a barrier to families enrolling at a childcare service and work to remove these wherever possible; including considering options for payment when affordability is an issue for families
- Review the number of families enrolled in childcare, experiencing financial hardship and the effectiveness of the procedures for late payment and support offered and advise the Approved Provider
- Clearly communicate this policy and payment options to families in a culturally sensitive way, and in the family's first language where possible
- Inform the Approved Provider of any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service
- Assist the Approved Provider, as required, in sighting supporting documentation for access to the various Government subsidies
- Refer families' questions in relation to this policy to the Approved Provider
- Ensure families that attend both sessional kindergarten and a long day care service nominate and document which service the child will participate in the free funded kindergarten program.

Educators

- Comply with the Uniting Privacy Policy regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of fees
- Inform the Approved Provider of any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service
- Refer families' questions in relation to this policy to the Approved Provider.

Parents

Read the service's:

- Fee information for families
- Fee Payment Agreement and the Complying Written Arrangement (CWA) where required and Schedule of Fees and Charges
- Provide the required documentation to enable the service to claim the various Government subsidies for eligible families
- Notify the service if your child will not be attending a child care program for an extended period. To hold your child's place while not attending the program, parents are required to continue to pay all fees.

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER		FEE POLICY		
Content Owner	General Manager Early Learning			Page 5 of 10
Document Author	Senior Manager EL Quality & Education	Document Version	V 7.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	14/11/2023	Revision Due Date	05/10/2024	

Fee information for families

How fees are set

As part of the budget development process the service takes the following into account when setting fees for programs:

1. The financial viability of the service
2. The level of government funding provided for the program, including any subsidies and concessions
3. The availability of other income sources, such as grants
4. Reasonable expenditure in meeting agreed program quality and standards
5. The requirements of State and Commonwealth Government service and funding agreements

Schedule of fees and charges

A schedule of fees and charges or a *Complying Written Arrangement* (CWA) for the program in which the child is enrolled will be provided to parents on enrolment.

Late collection charge

It is the responsibility of the parents to ensure their child is collected at the end of the session or prior to the service closing. If the parent does not contact the service to advise of unavoidable delays in collecting their child, a fee may be imposed. If the parent continues to be late in collecting the child, a late fee will be imposed.

The long day care and kindergarten late collection fee is \$10 for every 10 minutes. Parents will be invoiced separately from their fees and Childcare Subsidy will not be applied. The responsible person and family will sign the late collection form, which will be considered and authorised by the person in day-to-day charge of the service.

Fundraising

Fundraising activities are an additional way the service can raise funds for specific purposes. While participation in fundraising is voluntary, the support of every family is encouraged. Fundraising activities are also an opportunity for families and communities to come together.

Purchase of additional unfunded Kindergarten Sessions

Subject to availability some services may be able to offer unfunded kindergarten places or additional fee-paying sessions for children attending the three (3) and four (4) year old kindergarten program. If this is available, parents will be required to consent to the payment agreement, number 14.4.

Due to funding agreements between Uniting and The Department of Education it is a requirement that every child be able to participate in two years of kindergarten. For this reason, in the unlikely event that all places at the kindergarten are filled and a child requires a funded year of kindergarten we may need you to forgo the program or additional fee-paying session. Uniting will return any unused funds to you.

If you have enrolled your child into unfunded kindergarten sessions, you are committing to the full year of additional sessions. A refund of fees will only be available in certain situations and on a case-by-case basis.

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER		FEE POLICY		
Content Owner	General Manager Early Learning			Page 6 of 10
Document Author	Senior Manager EL Quality & Education	Document Version	V 7.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	14/11/2023	Revision Due Date	05/10/2024	

Payment of fees – additional unfunded kindergarten sessions

Payment of unfunded additional kindergarten sessions is required prior to the commencement of each term:

- For term one 2024, payment is required prior to commencement of term 1
- For term two 2024, payment is required by 4 March 2024
- For term three 2024, payment is required by 7 June 2024
- For term four 2024, payment is required by 13 September 2024

Full payment for the year in advance will attract a 10% discount.

Centrepay

Uniting does have an option to pay by Centrepay.

To organise the setup of Centrepay payments, please contact accountsreceivable@vt.uniting.org or call 03 9051 5100 to speak to our Accounts Receivable team.

Child Care Subsidy

Childcare Subsidy assist eligible families with the cost of childcare fees. Childcare Subsidy will be paid directly to the approved provider to reduce the fees you pay.

For further information contact the service.

- CCS Helpdesk on: ccshelpdesk@education.gov.au or 1300 667 276

The Child Care Safety Net provides families and services extra support if they are vulnerable and disadvantaged or located in a regional or remote community. The Child Care Safety Net includes: The Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS)

The ACCS provides extra payment on top of the Child Care Subsidy for families who need more help.

There are four different payments:

- For families who need help to support their children's safety and wellbeing
- For grandparents who care for their grandchildren
- For families experiencing temporary significant financial hardship
- For parents transitioning from welfare to work

Further information can be found at the Services Australia website: [Click here](#)

First and Last Day Absences

If a child begins or ends child care with an absence, the parent is not entitled to receive subsidy for the session/s and will be required to pay the full fee.

Staff Discount – Child Care

If a permanent part-time or full-time early learning staff member is enrolling a child for which they have primary care responsibilities, a 60% discount applies for each child. All other Uniting employees who have primary care responsibilities, a 10% discount applies for each child.

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER		FEE POLICY		
Content Owner	General Manager Early Learning			Page 7 of 10
Document Author	Senior Manager EL Quality & Education	Document Version	V 7.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	14/11/2023	Revision Due Date	05/10/2024	

Payment of fees – Child Care

The service will review payment options and procedures to ensure that they are inclusive and sensitive to families' cultural and financial situations.

Fees will be invoiced to parents directly and must be paid by the date indicated on the invoice. Each invoice will be accompanied by payment instructions.

Parents of children in **long day care** are required to pay fees by **direct debit** on a fortnightly basis. Families who have a 3rd party organisation paying their fees on their behalf will be exempt. From 1 January 2024, all Victorian child care services (except occasional care and Family Day Care) will be charging fees two weeks in advance.

Parents of children attending **Occasional Care** will be invoiced in arrears. Parents are required to pay fortnightly via direct debit. Families who have a 3rd party organisation paying their fees on their behalf will be exempt.

Parents of children attending **Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) /Vacation Care** will be invoiced two weeks in advanced (some legacy programs may invoice in arrears). Parents are required to pay fortnightly via direct debit. Casual bookings for OSHC/Vacation Care may attract a higher fee. Booking cancellations for Casual OSHC or Vacation Care made within 7 business days of the booked session will be charged as a full fee absence. Vacation Care Excursion Days require cancellation 10 business days prior or will be charged as a full fee absence. Casual and Vacation Care bookings cancelled prior to these times will not attract a fee.

Some legacy childcare services provide a 50% discount on Gap Fees for up to 10 absences, when given at least 10 business days notice. This is not applicable for all programs, is provided at the discretion of the Approved Provider and could be withdrawn at anytime with notice.

Permanent bookings at all services will attract fees for each session, including child absences, unless otherwise advised by the approved provider. Gazetted Public Holidays and voluntary closures for professional development days or during December/January shut down periods do not attract any fees. Waiving of daily fees is at the sole discretion of the Approved Provider and is not guaranteed.

There is a surcharge added when using a credit card for direct debit. Using a bank account incurs no additional fee:

- 1.45% for Visa/Mastercard
- 3.60% for AMEX
- Failed direct debits incur a dishonor fee of \$8.80 per dishonor.

Direct debits are processed before 5am on your scheduled payment day. Please ensure you have funds available the night before the payment is due to be processed.

Families experiencing difficulty in paying fees are requested to contact accountsreceivable@vt.uniting.org or call 03 90515100.

In relation to a family's financial/personal circumstances, the Privacy policy will always be complied with.

Unpaid fees

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

- An initial reminder will be given to parents and will include information on how to contact our Accounts Receivable team where there are concerns regarding payment
- A second reminder will be given to families, further to that, unless there are extenuating circumstances, a payment plan will be required before the child can attend the service

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER	FEE POLICY			
Content Owner	General Manager Early Learning			Page 8 of 10
Document Author	Senior Manager EL Quality & Education	Document Version	V 7.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	14/11/2023	Revision Due Date	05/10/2024	

- If a decision is made to withdraw the child’s place at the service, the parents will be notified in writing
- Uniting may also choose to employ the services of a debt collector
- Uniting reserves the right to vary this process on compassionate grounds.

Child Care Subsidy (CCS) Cessation Agreement

To continue to receive child care services, guardians are required to continue to make regular payments towards their child care services. It is expected that the Guardian pays a minimum of the anticipated gap fees, based off of the CCS percentage before CCS was cut off. Guardians will be required to enter into the *Child Care Subsidy (CCS) Cessation Agreement*.

Refund of fees

If a family becomes eligible for a subsidy or concession, they are required to provide evidence of eligibility to the service for concession to be applied from the following Term.

There will be **no** refund of fees in the following circumstances:

- A child’s short-term illness
- Public holidays
- Family holiday during operational times

Fees may not be refunded if a service closes due to extreme and unavoidable circumstances. This decision will be made by the Approved Provider. (refer *Service Closure* policy).

In addition, there will be no refund where a parent chooses not to send their child to the program for the maximum number of hours for which they are enrolled.

Gap Fee Waiver Application

As part of our strategy to support vulnerable families, we are implementing a process where, we will waive the Gap Fee for the calculated weeks with families to continue paying their gap fee to reduce their debt.

Closure of service for staff training days

To support the positive correlation between educator ongoing professional development and improved learning outcomes for children, Uniting facilitates professional development opportunities for all educators. If staff are required to attend when the usual program is operating, the service will be closed. Days will be identified on a yearly basis depending upon the professional learning needs and requirements of individual service type. Parents will be notified of the dates in advance to enable alternative care arrangements to be made. Fees will not be charged when services are closed for educators to participate in professional development.

Children turning three during the year of enrolment

For a kindergarten program in Victoria, children must turn three years of age by 30 April in the year of attendance. Children can only attend the three (3) year old program once they have turned three years of age. If a child turns three after the program commences, their place will be held. Pro-rata fees will apply once the child commences.

Financial support services

Parents experiencing financial hardship may require access to family support services. Further information can be obtained from your early years’ service.

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER	FEE POLICY		
Content Owner	General Manager Early Learning		Page 9 of 10
Document Author	Senior Manager EL Quality & Education	Document Version	V 7.0 Policy No. 014
Date Published	14/11/2023	Revision Due Date	05/10/2024

Notification of fee changes during the year

Fees set for the year would only be reviewed in extraordinary circumstances, for example, if attendance rates fall below the budget 'break even' point. Parents will be notified one term in advance of any required fee increase and will be offered the option to request a payment plan.

DOCUMENT TITLE & NUMBER		FEE POLICY		
Content Owner	General Manager Early Learning			Page 10 of 10
Document Author	Senior Manager EL Quality & Education	Document Version	V 7.0	Policy No. 014
Date Published	14/11/2023	Revision Due Date	05/10/2024	

Printed hard copies of this document are considered uncontrolled.
Please refer to the Uniting Intranet/Document Management System for the latest version.