



The
Education
State

Kindergarten Resource

Maternal & Child Health Nurses

March 2026



Department
of Education

Acknowledgment of Country

The department proudly acknowledges Victoria's Aboriginal communities and their rich and enduring cultures.

We acknowledge Aboriginal people as Australia's first peoples and as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and water on which we rely. We pay respect to Elders past and present, and we work to support emerging Aboriginal leaders.

We recognise Aboriginal people as Victoria's first teachers, artists and scientists, and we value the ongoing contribution of First Nations people and communities to Victorian life and how this enriches us all.

We embrace the spirit of reconciliation as we work together to deliver the Victorian Government's commitment to Voice, Treaty and Truth.

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What is kinder?

Kindergarten (also known as kinder) is an early education program for young children, led by a qualified early childhood teacher.

Kindergarten programs allow children to learn through play. Play is how young children learn best, and supports all areas of their development, including their understanding of themselves and relationships to others.

Children are given the opportunity to use their imagination and practise important skills, such as problem-solving, through play-based learning.

Children start to learn literacy, numeracy and language skills at kinder. They also learn how to get along with others, share, listen, and focus their attention.

Australian and international evidence shows that quality play-based kindergarten programs help lay the foundation for success throughout a child's education and life.

Positive attitudes towards learning, such as persistence, curiosity and imagination, are developed during play, setting children up for a lifelong love of learning.

Kinder programs are designed to meet the needs of their local families. All kinder programs work with the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework. This makes sure the programs are right for children's stage of development.

Resources to share with families:

Websites:



[Sending your child to kinder](#)



[Kinder quick guide for parents](#)



Kindergarten programs in Victoria

In Victoria, it is recommended children attend kindergarten programs for 2 years before school.

- **Three-Year-Old Kindergarten** is now available statewide with services offering programs between 5 and 15 hours each week. By 2029, services across Victoria will deliver 15 hours of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten per week.
- From 2025, **Four-Year-Old Kindergarten** in Victoria began gradually transitioning to **Pre-Prep**. This means that hours will steadily increase from 15 hours to 30 hours per week. By 2036, all services will offer between 16 and 30 hours each week of kindergarten for 4-year-olds.

Children can attend a kinder program at either a long day care centre or at a standalone (sessional) kindergarten.

A long day care centre can offer a full day of education and care, including a kinder program. The teacher-led kinder program is integrated with additional hours of education and care.

At a standalone service, a kinder program will operate on certain days and at specific times. These days and hours are set by the kinder service.

It's important for parents and carers to know that no matter where their child goes to funded kinder, teachers and trained educators will lead the program.



Victoria is leading the nation

Victoria is the first Australian state or territory to give children universal access to 2 years of funded kindergarten programs before they start school.

Victoria's expansion of Three- and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten gives children the 'gift of time' with qualified early childhood teachers and educators, during a period of rapid brain development.

Providing a longer program in the year before school gives more time for children of all backgrounds and abilities to deepen their learning and development, and for services to deepen their relationships with families.

Teachers and educators can also provide deeper and more deliberate play experiences, which will give children opportunities to embed their learning.

All children stand to benefit from attending a quality play-based kindergarten program.

From 2025, Four-Year-Old Kindergarten will gradually transition to Pre-Prep, with funded hours increasing to between 16 and 30 hours each week by 2036.

It is also recognised that kindergarten will have an especially big impact for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from refugee or asylum seeker backgrounds, and children who have had contact with Child Protection services, and encouraging families within these cohorts to enrol in kindergarten is particularly important.

That is why these children will be prioritised for access to between 16 and 25 hours of Pre-Prep per week from 2026 onwards, increasing to between 16 and 30 hours per week from 2028.



Best Start, Best Life reforms

The Victorian Government's **Best Start, Best Life** reforms are the most significant change to Victoria's early childhood sector in a generation.

Victoria is building on its nation-leading early childhood system by delivering:

- **Free Kinder:** Free Kinder is available for all 3- and 4-year-old children at participating Victorian services in standalone (sessional) kindergartens and long day care centres.
- **Pre-Prep:** By 2036, 4-year-old children in all locations across Victoria will have access to between 16 and 30 hours of Pre-Prep.
- **Three-Year-Old Kindergarten:** Three-Year-Old Kindergarten continues, with programs increasing to 15 hours a week across the state by 2029, providing Victorian children with 2 years of a quality kindergarten program before school
- **Early learning and childcare centres:** 50 Victorian government-owned and operated early learning and childcare centres are being established. These centres will be built in areas with the greatest need and will make it easier for families to access early childhood education and childcare.

For questions relating to the Best Start, Best Life reforms, contact bsbl@education.vic.gov.au

Resources to share with families:

Websites:



[Give your child the best start](#)



[Pre-Prep](#)

Free Kinder

Free Kinder supports families with access to 2 years of high-quality kindergarten programs for all Victorian children.

Free Kinder is available for Three- and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten programs at participating services in both standalone (sessional) services and long day care centres. In 2025, 97% of services offered Free Kinder.

Free Kinder is for everyone. Families don't need to be permanent residents or Australian citizens to access a free kindergarten program.

Free Kinder at standalone (sessional) kindergartens

Families with children enrolled in participating sessional kindergarten services receive a free program:

- For Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, this means a free program of between 5 and 15 hours per week.
- For Four-Year-Old Kindergarten, this means a free program of 15 hours per week.
- For Pre-Prep, this means a free program of between 16 and 30 hours per week.

Free Kinder at long day care centres

Families with children enrolled in participating long day care centres will receive a fee offset.

Families with children enrolled in a Three-Year-Old kindergarten program of less than 15 hours will receive a pro-rata amount.

Most families will still pay some fees for their child's attendance across the week, depending on the number of days attended and their Commonwealth Childcare Subsidy entitlement.

Participating kindergarten programs receive funding directly from the Victorian Government, so families are not out of pocket, and don't have to claim the savings back.

Families can access a funded kindergarten program and Free Kinder subsidy at only one service at any one time. Kindergarten services will ask families to complete a One Funded Place declaration to confirm where they will receive their funding.

Resources to share with families:

Website:



[Free Kinder](#)



When to start kindergarten

Children can attend kindergarten programs in the 2 years before they start primary school.

Families with children born between January and April can choose which year to start at Three-Year-Old Kindergarten. These children can start in the same year they turn 3 years of age, or in the year they turn 4. Due to staff requirements, some services may ask that children start attending at kindergarten after their third birthday.

The age a child starts at kindergarten relates to when they will start at primary school. When enrolling at Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, encourage families to plan ahead and consider the age they would like their child to start at school.

If families are unsure about the best time for their child to start kindergarten or if a child has a disability or learning difficulty, they can seek advice from trusted early childhood professionals such as local kindergarten service teachers or their child's Maternal and Child Health Nurse about how the program and environment can support their child.

Resources to share with families:

Websites:



[Sending your child to kinder](#)



[Types of kinder programs](#)



Benefits of 2 years of kindergarten

Australian and international evidence shows quality play-based kindergarten programs help lay the foundation for success throughout a child's education and life.

Two years of quality early childhood education is shown to have more impact than one year and can lift children's outcomes across all learning domains.

The first 5 years of life are a period of rapid brain development — by the time a child turns 5 years old, around 90 per cent of their brain development has occurred.

There is an opportunity to optimise a child's executive function and self-regulation between the ages of 3 and 5. What a child experiences during these years can make a significant difference to their future cognitive, social, and emotional outcomes, including how they manage their feelings and relate to others.

When children access 2 years of high-quality kindergarten programs before school, it has many benefits, especially for children who need additional support.

Resources to share with families:

Website:



[Benefits of attending 2 years of kinder](#)



Choosing and enrolling in a kindergarten service

There are different hours available for Three-Year-Old programs.

Kindergarten programs are available in standalone kindergartens and long day care centres.



Kinder Tick helps Victorian families find a funded kindergarten program for their child.

When a Kinder Tick is displayed at an early childhood service, families can be confident that:

- the program will be led by a teacher
- children will benefit from play-based learning
- the kindergarten program is funded and approved by the Victorian Government
- the program complies with government guidelines and the National Quality Framework.

Resources to share with families:

Websites:



[Find a Kinder](#)

Resources to share with families:

Websites:



[Starting Blocks](#) to look at childcare services' ratings



[How to choose a kindergarten](#)



[ACECQA National Registers](#) to look at all childcare and kindergarten services' ratings



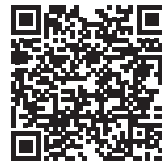
Families can register for a kindergarten program through their local council's Central Registration and Enrolment Scheme (CRES), or through their preferred provider (if a council does not deliver a CRES). The Find a Kinder website will let families know how they can register.

Most CRES providers and services have a registration and enrolment process that opens the year before a child starts a kindergarten program, so it helps to register when a child turns 2 years old.

Local councils will be able to provide information on kindergarten open days and enrolment processes. Families are encouraged to visit the service and meet with the staff, to ensure the service meets the needs of the child.

Resources to share with families:

Websites:



[Kindergarten Central Registration and Enrolment](#)



[How to enrol in kindergarten](#)



Supporting all Victorians to participate in kindergarten programs

There are a range of supports for Victorian government funded kindergartens to enable all children to access and participate in kindergarten programs.

Families can find more information on the department website, or speak with kindergarten services.

Koorie Kids Shine

Koorie Kids Shine promotes the benefits of kindergarten to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and the community.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 3 can access 15 hours of free kindergarten each week through Early Start Kindergarten and 4-year-olds can access up to 25 hours of Pre-Prep.

Koorie Kids Shine also provides information and imagery to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, and has content, including videos, for families and educators.

To learn more about Koorie Kids Shine or to order resources free of charge, please visit: [Early childhood education programs supporting Aboriginal children](#)

Resources to share with families:

Website:



[Kindergarten for Aboriginal children: Koorie Kids Shine](#)



Supporting culturally and linguistically diverse families to engage in kindergarten

There are a range of programs available to support families from CALD backgrounds to access and participate in kindergarten.

The CALD Outreach Initiative supports the inclusion of children from CALD backgrounds in kindergarten and Pre-Prep through CALD Outreach Worker positions at 26 local councils. CALD Outreach Workers provide direct support to families as well as early childhood education and care services to address engagement barriers and support transitions to school and ongoing participation in education.

Early Childhood Language Services provides free interpreting and translation services to funded kindergarten services to strengthen engagement with parents and carers who speak a language other than English or use Auslan.

Parents and carers can use the in-bound telephone interpreting service to contact a kindergarten service using a telephone interpreter in language.

For more information on the CALD Outreach Initiative, families can contact their participating local council directly or the department at early.years.programs@education.vic.gov.au

Resources to share with families:

Websites:



[Supporting CALD families to engage in kindergarten](#)



[Information about kindergarten in your language](#)



[CALD Outreach Initiative](#) to see the list of local councils involved in the initiative



Early Start Kindergarten

Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) provides eligible children with 15 hours of free or low-cost kindergarten each week led by a qualified teacher.

To be eligible for ESK, children must be from a refugee or asylum seeker background, identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, or be from a family that has had contact with Child Protection or are in out-of-home-care.

Eligible children should be enrolled in ESK, even where Free Kinder or 15 hours per week of funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten is offered.

Enrolling children through ESK means they have priority of access, can enrol without up-to-date immunisation information (while they undertake catch-up immunisations) under No Jab, No Play legislation, and their service can receive additional funding and support such as through School Readiness Funding.

Resources to share with families:

Website:



[Early Start Kindergarten](#)

Further information:



[Early Start Kindergarten Information for Professionals](#)

Kindergarten Inclusion Support Program

The Kindergarten Inclusion Support Program (KIS) enhances a kindergarten's capacity to respond to the individual abilities, interests and needs of children with a disability, developmental delay, high support needs or complex medical needs.

Support can include:

- specialist consultancy
- specialist training for staff
- minor building modifications
- additional staffing support.

Parents/guardians/carers of children in kindergarten programs who have concerns regarding their child's development should discuss these with their child's early childhood teacher in the first instance.

Resources to share with families:

Further information:



[Kindergarten Inclusion Support](#)

Available on website:

- KIS Specialised Equipment Program FAQs
- Guidelines and information: KIS disability program
- Guidelines and information: KIS complex medical needs program

Kindergarten Inclusion Support Specialist Equipment Program

Specialised equipment is available for loan, at no cost, to Victorian Government funded kindergarten programs to support children with significant disabilities to participate in kindergarten.

KIS SEP allows greater inclusion of children with significant disabilities. This connects the children's learning with the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework. The program will loan specialised equipment to funded kindergarten services across Victoria. This supports the inclusion of children with significant disabilities at no cost to the service.

Resources to share with families:

Website:



[KIS Specialised Equipment Program](#)



LOOKOUT

LOOKOUT Centres operate in each of the department's 4 regions.

These strengthen the capability of early childhood services, schools, child protection, and Out-of-Home Care (OoHC) organisations to improve educational outcomes for children and young people living in OoHC.

LOOKOUT Centres are staffed by multidisciplinary teams including Early Childhood Learning Advisors (ECLAs).

ECLAs promote and support:

- [Early Start Kindergarten](#)
- enrolment and ongoing engagement in quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings
- the transition to school process
- inclusive, culturally safe and trauma informed practice in ECEC settings

For advice, please contact the ECLA at your regional LOOKOUT Centre:

- North Eastern Victorian Region (NEVR) lookout.nev@education.vic.gov.au
- North Western Victorian Region (NWVR) lookout.nwv@education.vic.gov.au
- South Eastern Victorian Region (SEVR) lookout.sev@education.vic.gov.au
- South Western Victorian Region (SWVR) lookout.swv@education.vic.gov.au

Resources to share with families:

Website:



[LOOKOUT Centres](#)



Preschool Field Officer Program

The Preschool Field Officer program is designed to provide practical advice and support to funded kindergarten services for children with additional needs.

Support can include:

- providing information, resources and program strategies
- coaching for teachers and modelling specific strategies
- identification of referral pathways.

Preschool Field Officers do not deliver direct interventions with children, but rather support, guide and coach early childhood teachers to provide high-quality programs that support the inclusion of children with additional needs.

Parents/guardians/carers of children in funded kindergarten programs who have concerns regarding their child's development should discuss these with their child's early childhood teacher in the first instance.

Resources to share with families:

Website:



[Preschool Field Officer program](#)

Available on website:

- Preschool Field Officer factsheet



Access to Early Learning

Access to Early Learning is an early intervention program for 3-year-old children from families with complex needs. It supports these children to get the full benefits of attending a quality kindergarten program.

Trained facilitators work with families and services for the full calendar year, using a child-focused and strengths-based approach. Facilitators assist families to support their child to regularly attend kindergarten. They also visit families at home to help parents and carers with activities to build on what their child is learning at kindergarten.

AEL facilitators will work with kindergartens to ensure the child is supported at the service, and professional learning is also available for teachers who support AEL enrolments.

Children are eligible for AEL if they or their families have 2 or more complex needs, including:

- have had contact with Child Protection
- child and/or parent with intellectual or physical disability
- family violence
- mental health concerns
- sexual assault
- alcohol and drug abuse.

Resources to share with families:

Website:



[Access Early Learning](#)

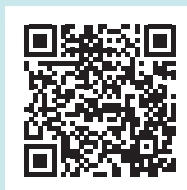


Resources for Maternal & Child Health Nurses

The department has a suite of resources, including factsheets, brochures and translated materials, available to help MCH nurses in communicating to parents about kindergarten.

The [Victorian Kindergarten Resources Portal](#) allows you to order hard copies of these materials free of charge, with some restrictions.

You can register to access the [Victorian Kindergarten Resources Portal](#) by selecting 'Create an account' on the Sign In page.





The Education State