

Advice for families: FREE KINDER in 2023

Three- and Four-Year-Old Kinder will be free and available across Victoria at participating services in 2023. Free Kinder is available in both long day care and sessional (standalone) settings.

Savings for families

Free Kinder means a saving of up to \$2,500 per child, each year. Free Kinder funding for kindergarten programs is on top of the funding already provided to kindergarten services each year by the Victorian Government.

Participating kindergarten services delivering Free Kinder will receive the funding directly from the Victorian Government, so families are not out of pocket (and don't have to claim the savings back).

Hours per week of Free Kinder

- For three-year-olds, Free Kinder means from 5 and up to 15 hours per week of a kindergarten program
- For four-year-olds, Free Kinder means 15 hours per week (600 hours a year).

Savings in a long day care setting

If your child attends a funded kindergarten program in a long day care (childcare) setting, a \$2,000 Free Kinder subsidy (paid direct to the program provider) for a 15-hour program will offset your out-of-pocket fees. 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.

Savings in a sessional (standalone) kindergarten setting

Free Kinder in sessional (standalone) kindergarten services will be supported to provide a free, 15 hour kindergarten program through an additional per child payment of \$2,500.

Three-Year-Old Kindergarten programs that are less than 15 hours per week will be paid the Free Kinder subsidy pro-rata.

Children who attend a sessional kindergarten program (that does not attract the Commonwealth Child Care Subsidy) in a long day care service will attract the sessional rate of \$2,500 and be able to participate at no cost.

How to claim

Your kindergarten provider should tell you if they are part of the Free Kinder initiative, and there is no need to claim the funding. You will not be charged (for up to 15 hours of kindergarten) in a sessional setting, and will receive regular fee offsets in long day care settings that will total \$2,000 across the year for a 15 hour program.

Enrolling your child

Process

1. Free Kinder is for everyone. Families do not need to show a Health Care Card or Pension Card, or Australian citizenship (or similar) to be eligible to access.
2. You'll be provided with a form to enrol your child in kindergarten for 2023.
3. If you are registering your child via a Central Registration and Enrolment Scheme, you may need to pay a fee. This fee will not be refunded as it is not part of the Free Kinder program.
4. When you enrol your child at a kinder, you may be charged an enrolment deposit to secure your child's place. This will be refunded.
5. Any parent / carer fees that have been paid for 2023 must be refunded.
6. There is no deadline or closure for enrolments for 2023 kindergarten programs, however all programs have a set number of places for children available. Once those places are filled, new enrolments be taken.
7. Your local council and kindergarten services can help you find a place in kindergarten or visit vic.gov.au/Kinder to find a kinder program.

One Free Kinder program per child

Families can only enrol their child in one Free Kinder program at any one time.

This means that all children can access a funded kindergarten program and Free Kinder subsidy only at one service at any one time. Families cannot receive the benefit twice and your kindergarten service must contact you to confirm this.

Other charges

Can I be requested to make a donation?

Kindergarten services may ask families for a voluntary donation. This could be to meet the cost of a specific activity or purpose, or just to contribute to the overall cost of operating the service. Fundraising activities can also continue to be undertaken.

Your service must ensure that you understand that donations are not compulsory.

Can I be asked to pay for additional hours at a sessional service?

Sessional services that offer more than 15 hours per week (of a kindergarten program) must provide all families with the option of a free, 15-hour program.

Additional hours above 15 a week can be offered as an option for families, with fees for these additional hours set at the discretion of the service in consultation with its families.

As children in integrated kindergarten programs in long day care will attend more than 15 hours a week, out of pocket fees will still apply for most children.

Can I be charged for incursions/excursions for my child?

Services may charge cost recovery fees (i.e., entry and transport costs) for one-off excursions/ special events (e.g. once a term excursions).

Can I be charged a maintenance levy?

Additional compulsory charges, including maintenance levies, cannot be charged.

This includes for families who do not participate in working bees. Services can request voluntary contributions in lieu of participation in a working bee but must make clear this is not a compulsory charge.

Can I be charged for late pick-up?

Services can charge families late pick-up fees if this is the service's policy and has been clearly communicated to parents, as this is outside the fee charged for the delivery of the core 15-hour kindergarten program.

Find your local kindergarten program at vic.gov.au/kinder