

Funded Kindergarten Policy

Policy Number:	2003/08	Directorate:	Community Services
Approval by:	Council	Responsible Officer:	Manager Family and Children's Services
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1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to affirm Council's approach to the provision of funded kindergarten services, in its role as Early Years Manager (EYM). It is part of a suite of council policies and procedures that relate to the provision of early years services for children and families.

2. Context

Council's kindergarten services sit within the larger Council department of Family and Children's Services. Our early years services work in genuine collaboration and partnership with families, each other and non-Council organisations to achieve better outcomes for, and with children and their families in the Knox community. This is achieved through an integrated approach to service provision and delivery and is reflected in the Family and Children's Services Department Vision:

*We use **partnerships** and **advocacy** to **empower** children and families through the provision of focused integrated services from birth to school*

Council delivers funded kindergarten programs for eligible children, including Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) and Access to Early Learning (AEL) in both sessional and integrated funded kindergarten programs within a long day care setting in its designated role as an Early Years Manager. The operation of Council's funded kindergarten services is underpinned by the following Guiding Principles:

- High Quality;
- Inclusive and accessible;
- Integrated;
- Flexible and responsive; and
- Operationally viable and sustainable.

All of Council's Early Childhood Education and Care services are approved under the Australian Education and Care Services National Law Act (2010) and Regulations (2011). As an Approved Provider, Council is responsible for meeting the National Quality Framework (NQF) requirements for standards and practices described in the seven Quality Areas. Council is also committed to creating a Child Safe Environment as described in the Child Safe Standards in the Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment Act (2015) and Child Wellbeing and Safety Regulations (2017).

3. Scope

This policy applies to Council delivered funded kindergarten programs for eligible children for which Council receives a subsidy from the State Government. This includes both sessional and integrated funded kindergarten within a long day care program.

4. References

4.1 Community Plan 2021-31

- **Key Direction - Connection, resilience and wellbeing**

4.2 Council Plan 2021-25

Strategies:

- Support our community to improve their physical, mental and social health and wellbeing
- Foster inclusivity, equality belonging and safety within the community

4.3 Child, Youth and Seniors Plan 2021-25

- 1.3 Prioritise the needs of vulnerable children and implement integrated service strategies that provide full access to services and supports for families and community members, to support all children in Knox to successfully transition to school
- 1.4 Advocate for the provision of targeted resources to ensure that all children in Knox have the opportunity to participate in two years of funded kindergarten
- 2.2 Plan for future municipal early years infrastructure needs to provide access to funded kindergarten for 3 and 4-year-old children in Knox, in line with Council's decision on kindergarten expansion
- 5.4 Undertake business system improvements to remain sustainable and enhance the experience of community members accessing Children's Services

4.4 Relevant Legislation and Standards

- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic);
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic);
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment Act 2015;
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Regulations 2017;
- Child Wellbeing and Safety (information sharing) Amendment Regulations 2021
- Child Safe Standards (Vic);
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992;
- Early Years Management Policy Framework 2016;
- Early Years Management Improvement Framework 2021
- Education and Care Services National Law 2010;
- Education and Care Services Regulations 2011, incorporating Amendments 2017;
- Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004;
- No Jab No Play Legislation.

4.5 Relevant Policy and Data Sources

- Australian Early Development Census;
- Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out-of-Home-Care;
- Education State Early Childhood Reform Plan;
- National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education;
- National Partnership Agreement for Early Childhood Education;
- National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development;
- National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care;

- National Early Years Learning Framework;
- National Quality Standards for Early Childhood;
- Reportable Conduct Scheme;
- Victorian Kindergarten Early Years Management Policy Framework;
- Victorian Kindergarten Policy, Procedures and Funding Criteria;
- Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework;
- Victorian Child Safe Standards’

4.6 Charter of Human Rights

- This procedure has been assessed against and complies with the charter of Human Rights.

4.7 Related Council Policies

- Local Government Act 1989 or Local Government Act 2020 as applicable – Conflict and Interest Provisions.
- Funded Kindergarten Policy

4.8 Related Council Procedures

- Funded Kindergarten Central Registration and Enrolment Procedure

5. Definitions

Detail any definitions within the policy.

Access to Early Learning (AEL)	<p>The Access to Early Learning (AEL) program provides an intensive early intervention. Through AEL, a facilitator supports three-year-olds from families experiencing vulnerability with multiple and complex needs, assisting them to access universal kindergarten programs. AEL is for families that have a range of barriers to children's kindergarten participation.</p> <p>AEL facilitators undertake in-home visits and work with families to build their child’s engagement with formal learning. They also work to strengthen the home learning environment. Facilitators collaborate with educators and other services to support the family and child.</p>
Approved Capacity	Is the maximum number of children an early years’ service location is permitted and licensed by DET to have on premises.
Approved Provider	Individual, organisation or company with management or control to operate the education and care service.
Adult Capacity Strengthening	Empowering families by adopting helping practices that strengthen parental competence and self-efficacy, aiming to ensure that involvement with families’ results in increased autonomy, skills and confidence.
Central Registration and Enrolment Scheme	Knox City Council’s process of registering and enrolling children in kindergarten for families, ensuring the process is simple, consistent, inclusive and equitable for the Council Managed Funded Kindergartens.
Collaborative Practice	Sharing knowledge and expertise in partnership. The role of the family is to bring their detailed knowledge and understanding of the child and family context to the partnership, while the role of the practitioner is to facilitate parents accessing, adapting and applying best evidence ideas and approaches to the issues they face.
Council	Knox City Council, whether constituted before or after the commencement of this Policy.

DET	<u>Department of Education and Training (Victoria).</u> The State Government department responsible for funding, services approvals and regulations of approved early years services in Victoria.
Early Start Kindergarten (ESK)	Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) predominately addresses financial barriers by providing eligible children with 15 hours of free or low-cost kindergarten each week led by a qualified Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registered teacher. ESK is available to children who are at least three years old by 30 April in the year they are enrolled to attend the program and are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; or • Known to Child Protection, or have been referred to Child FIRST.
Early Years Management (EYM)	Early Years Management brings together a group of community-based kindergarten services under the management of a single service provider. It is a key strategy to building a stronger, responsive universal kindergarten system.
Early Years Services	Long Day Care, Occasional Care, Kindergarten, Supported Playgroup, Preschool Field Officer Program and Maternal Child Health Service (unless otherwise specified).
Early Childhood Education and Care Services (ECEC)	Kindergarten and Long Day Care services that must operate in accordance with the National Quality Framework are referred to as education and care services.
Early Years Compact 2017-2027	A ten year agreement established in 2017 between the Department of Education and Training (DET), the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and local government – represented by the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV).
Eligible Children	Children who are assessed in accordance with the State Government’s Priority of Access requirements as eligible for a funded kindergarten place.
Evidence-based Practice	An approach that brings best available evidence, family values and beliefs, and practitioner’s skill and knowledge together in a way that produces quality education and care for children.
Family Centred Practice	Family priorities and choices guide the work, and that professionals and families work together to leverage family’s strengths and develop the resources and networks they need to most effectively make choices that will help their child to develop and learn.
Funded Kindergarten	An early childhood educational program delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher to children in the two years before school, for which funding is received from the Department. In Victoria, a funded kindergarten program complies with all the applicable requirements set out in the Kindergarten Funding Guide and provides a program in accordance with the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework. Funded kindergarten programs may operate in a variety of settings, including long day care centres, standalone services, schools, or community centres, and may be operated by a variety of service providers, including community organisations, local councils, schools, not-for-profit organisations or private operators.
Funded Place	A place in a kindergarten program for which a per capita grant is received. The number of funded places may be based on pre-confirmed enrolment numbers or the confirmed number of children enrolled and attending.
Integrated Long Day Care Program	For the purposes of kindergarten funding, an integrated long day care program is a funded kindergarten program provided as part of a long day care program.
National Quality Framework (NQF)	The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (the National Quality Framework) applies to kindergartens, long day care, family day care and outside school hours care services, and aims to raise quality and drive continuous

improvement and consistency in education and care services, with a focus on outcomes for children.

Operational Service Plan	Operational Service Plan describes the operations of Knox City Council’s Kindergarten Services for the following year. This includes the kindergarten centres offering funded sessional kindergarten, the number of kindergarten groups planned to deliver 5 hours for 3 year-old children and 15 hours for 4 year-old children and kindergarten session times.
Outcomes Focused	Being committed to making a real difference in the lives of children and families through gaining clarity on desired outcomes, and aligning experiences, practices and interventions to meet those outcomes.
Priority of Access (POA)	Council will ensure that Council managed funded kindergarten services are accessible to Knox residents and reflect the State Government Priority of Access requirements and funding requirements.
Strengths-based Approach	Shapes the way we think about and work with families. We view families as competent and we seek to understand and empathise with the reasons that drive their actions. We use their strengths to overcome barriers and challenges.
Team Around the Child (TAC)	Brings together a range of different professionals and the family across the early years’ service system to support an individual child and their family. The members of the TAC develop and deliver a package of practical outcome-focused support to meet the needs identified by the team through a collaborative approach.
Universal Access	Every child has access to, and participates in (with a focus on participation by children who identify as Indigenous or are experiencing vulnerability and/or disadvantage, regardless of the setting in which programs are delivered), a quality early childhood education program(s) for 600 hours per year for 4 year-old programs and 200 hours per year for 3 year-old programs, delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher who meets National Quality Framework requirements in a form that meets the needs of children, families and community, and at a cost that does not present a barrier to participation.

6. Council Policy

6.1 Council’s Role

Knox City Council plays a number of roles in relation to early years services across the municipality, including:

- Direct service delivery as an Approved Provider and Early Years Manager;
- Infrastructure provision;
- Municipal planner and advocate;
- Partnerships with non-Council service providers.

In relation to the Funded Kindergarten Policy, Council’s Executive Management Team will approve the Operational Service Plan on an annual basis to ensure Council’s kindergarten service delivery is aligned with the following Guiding Principles:

Guiding Principle

High Quality	<p>High quality early years services are delivered in a professional and respectful way using evidence-based practices, a contextual understanding of development, family centred practice, adult capacity strengthening, collaborative practices, strengths-based approach and are outcomes focused.</p> <p>The workforce that delivers the service is provided with opportunities to extend their professional knowledge and practice through professional development opportunities and reflective practices that critically evaluate practice and service delivery. This is central to maintaining a learning culture inclusive of children and families by applying evidence-based practices to advance children’s learning and development.</p>
Inclusive and accessible	<p>Council managed funded kindergarten services offer universal access to all Knox residents seeking a kindergarten place and reflect the State Government Priority of Access requirements and Council determined Priority of Access categories.</p> <p>The universal access is extended to children and families who are experiencing vulnerability and meet the State Governments priority one requirements to support the needs of children, families and the community.</p>
Integrated	<p>Service design and delivery considers the potential for effective co-located and collaborative service delivery and partnerships. Effective partnerships with other practitioners and professional services support Council’s goal to prioritise access to early years services for families experiencing vulnerability and helps strengthen integrated support for all children and families through family centred practice and the Team around the Child.</p> <p>All early years service providers working in partnership with Council should support a whole of municipality approach to the delivery of early years services, in accordance with Council’s endorsed vision, direction and priorities for early years services and facilities. Any agreement with Council to co-locate complementary services through a license or lease agreement in a purpose built Council facility, ensures that Council is able to prioritise access to that facility to deliver funded kindergarten services as required in Council’s role as an EYM.</p>
Flexible and responsive	<p>Council provides space for all services to support families with young children from 0-8 years. Council provides funded kindergarten via both sessional models and integrated kindergarten within a long day care program that balances community and Council objectives to best support families with young children.</p> <p>The number of kindergarten places to be available within each kindergarten group across the municipality in any given year will be based on approved capacity, available staffing to operate the service and demand for the service in particular communities.</p>
Operationally viable and sustainable	<p>Maximise current and future funded kindergarten enrolments now and into the future to a sustainable share of market that balances community and economic needs.</p>

In context the Knox City Council Kindergarten service will represent value for money with services and infrastructure delivered at a level of subsidy that is acceptable to Council. The service modelling will seek to create efficiencies by integrating systems and resources and reduce duplication with related services.

7. Administrative Updates

From time to time, circumstances may change leading to the need for minor administrative changes to this policy. Where an update does not materially alter this policy, such a change may be made administratively. Examples of minor administrative changes include changes to names of Council departments or positions, change to names of Federal or State Government departments or a minor amendment to legislation that does not have material impact. Where any change or update may materially change the intent of this policy, it must be considered by Council.