

Enrolment and Orientation Policy

PURPOSE

This policy outlines:

- the criteria for enrolment at NERPSA
- the process to be followed when enrolling a child, and the basis on which places within the programs will be allocated
- requirements in relation to No Jab No Play
- procedures for the orientation of new families and children into NERPSA
- processes to ensure compliance with legislative and DET funding requirements in relation to the enrolment of children in early childhood education and care services.

POLICY STATEMENT

1. VALUES

NERPSA is committed to:

- equal access for all children
- meeting the needs of the local community
- supporting families to meet the requirements for enrolment through the provision of information
- maintaining confidentiality in relation to the details provided on the NERPSA Registration Forms
- ensuring all families are welcomed and receive an effective orientation into the service.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to NERPSA, staff and parents/guardians who wish to have their children enrolled, or have children already enrolled at NERPSA.

3. BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

The Education and Care Services National Regulations require licensed services to have available information about admission requirements and enrolment procedures (Regulation 168(2)(k)). It is intended that all eligible children will have access to two years of funded kindergarten before school; however, a shortage of places in some areas can cause problems and limit choices for parents.

Where demand is higher than availability, Approved Provider's must adhere to their eligibility and priority of access criteria (refer to *Definitions* and *Attachment 1*) in order to allocate the available places. The criteria used to determine the allocation of places takes account of the requirements set out in *The Kindergarten Funding Guide* (refer to *Sources*), the service's philosophy, values and beliefs, and the provisions of the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*. The Victorian Government requires funded organisations to ensure that their policies and procedures promote equal opportunity for all children. Services participating in central enrolment schemes are required to comply with the enrolment procedures of that scheme.

Childcare services providing approved child care (refer to *Definitions*) must abide by the *Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Jobs for families childcare package) Act 2017* (refer to *Legislation and standards*) and the Commonwealth Government's *Priority for allocating places in child care services* (refer to *Sources*).

Immunisations are an effective means of reducing the risk of vaccine preventable diseases. Early childhood education and care services which are regulated under the *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* and *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011* have legislative responsibilities under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* to only offer a confirmed place in their programs to children with an Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) Immunisation History Statement (refer to *Definitions*). To meet the Child Care Subsidy immunisation requirements, children must be immunised according to the National Immunisation Program Schedule (refer to *Sources*) set out by the Australian Government Department of Health.

Relevant legislation may include but is not limited to:

- *A New Tax System (Family Assistance) (Administration) Act 1999*

- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)*
- *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (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*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)*
- *Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Jobs for Families Child Care Package) Act 2017*
- *National Quality Standard, Quality Area 6: Collaborative Partnerships with Families and Communities*
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 (Vic)*
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2019 (Vic)*
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)*

4. DEFINITIONS

Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) Immunisation History Statement: is the only form of acceptable evidence of immunisation. The AIR is a national register administered by Medicare that records all vaccinations given in Australia, including to children. Parents/carers must provide a copy of their most recent AIR Immunisation History Statement, which shows that the child is up to date with their immunisations upon enrolment and when a child has received or been due to receive a vaccination while attending the service. In the case of medical contraindication, an authorised medical practitioner completes and signs a Medical Exemption Form, and supplies it to the AIR. In order to confirm enrolment, the Immunisation History Statement must show the child is up to date with the vaccines they can have, medical contraindication and indicate the due date for the next vaccinations the child is able to receive in the future if applicable.

Approved child care providers: providers that operate services that have Australian Government approval to receive Child Care Subsidy (refer to Definitions) on behalf of eligible parents. Approved child care providers include centre-based day care, including long day care and occasional care, family day care, outside school hours care and in-home care.

Authorised nominee: (In relation to this policy) is a person who has been given written authority by the parents/guardians of a child to collect that child from the education and care service. These details will be on the child's enrolment form.

The National Law and National Regulations do not specify a minimum age limit for an authorised nominee. Each service will need to consider a risk assessment on an individual basis to determine if a person under the age of 18 is able to be an authorised nominee and, if so, what constitutes the minimum acceptable age at that service.

Child Care Subsidy (CCS): A Commonwealth Government means tested subsidy to assist eligible families with the cost of child care. Payments are paid directly to approved child care providers (refer to *Definitions*). Further information can be found at: <https://www.education.gov.au/child-care-subsidy-0>

Children with additional needs: Children whose development or physical condition needs specialist support or children who may need additional support due to language, cultural or economic circumstances.

Deferrals: A child who does not attend in the year when the child is eligible for a funded kindergarten place or is officially withdrawn from a service prior to the April data collection. These children are considered by DET not to have accessed a year of funded kindergarten, and are therefore eligible for DET funding in the following year.

Eligible child: as defined by the Kindergarten Funding Guide; a child that is at least four years old on April 30th in the year of enrolment; enrolled for at least 15 hours per week or 600 hours per year in a 4-year-old program; and not enrolled at a funded kindergarten program at another service. Or a child that is at least three years old on April 30th in the year of enrolment and is enrolled in a funded 3-year-old kindergarten program. Any child that is enrolled in an

early childhood and education and care service must have an AIR Immunisation History Statement that indicate that the child is fully vaccinated for their age or who qualify for the 16-weeks grace period.

Enrolment Form: The individual service enrolment form that collects details regarding individual children. This is completed after a place has been offered by NERPSA and accepted by the applicant.

Fees: The amount charged to attend a program at an individual service.

Grace period: allows specific categories of children of families experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage to enrol and attend the service without an AIR Immunisation History Statement (refer to *Definitions*) or when the statement is assessed as not being up-to-date. Services complete the grace period eligibility form with families during enrolment, and keep a copy with the child's enrolment record. The 16-week grace period starts on the first day of the child's attendance at the service. During the grace period, the service is required to take reasonable steps to obtain the AIR Immunisation History Statement (refer to *Definitions*) and to encourage families to access immunisation services.

Registration Form: The NERPSA Registration Form used to apply for a place at an individual kindergarten managed within NERPSA.

Priority of access: in instances where more eligible children apply for a place at a service than there are places available, the service must allocate spaces using the criteria outlined in *The Kindergarten Funding Guide* (see *Attachment 1: Eligibility and priority of access criteria for a 3 and 4-year-old funder kindergarten program*), or if in receipt of the CCS, comply with the Commonwealth Government's policy for allocating places (see *Source*).

Vulnerable Children/Families: Children are vulnerable if the capacity of parents and family to effectively care, protect and provide for their long-term development and wellbeing is limited. Some factors which may contribute to a child being vulnerable include: a child with a disability; living in a family with a low income, or one which is experiencing problems with housing, domestic violence, known to Child Protection, Out of Home Care, substance abuse, or mental health; Aboriginal and/or Torre Strait Islander, having a culturally and linguistically diverse background; having a young or sole parent, or a parent with a disability (adapted from the *Kindergarten Funding Guide*).

5. SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

- Australian Childhood Immunisation Register: www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/medicare/australian-childhood-immunisation-register
- Australian Government Department of Health, *National Immunisation Program Schedule*: <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/immunisation/immunisation-throughout-life/national-immunisation-program-schedule>
- Department of Health and Human Services, *Immunisation enrolment toolkit for early childhood education and care service*: <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/immunisation/vaccination-children/no-jab-no-play/immunisation-enrolment-toolkit>
- *Guide to the Education and Care Services National Law and the Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011*: www.acecqa.gov.au/
- *Guide to the National Quality Standard*: www.acecqa.gov.au/
- Priority of Access Guidelines for child care service: <https://www.dese.gov.au/uncategorised/resources/priority-access-guidelines-child-care-services>
- The Family Assistance Law as the basis for Commonwealth child care fee assistance including the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) and Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS): <https://www.education.gov.au/child-care-legislation>
- *The Kindergarten Funding Guide* (Department of Education and Training): www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/kinderfundingcriteria.aspx
- Victorian Department of Health: www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation
- *Acceptance and Refusal of Authorisations Policy*
- *Dealing with Infectious Disease Policy*
- *Inclusion and Equity Policy*
- *Complaints and Grievances Policy*
- *Fees Policy*

- *Privacy Policy*

PROCEDURES

NERPSA is responsible for:

- determining the criteria for priority of access to programs at [Service Name], as described in The Kindergarten Funding Guide; and/or as describe under the Family Assistance Law for CCS recipients, and the service's philosophy
- considering any barriers to access that may exist, developing procedures that ensure all eligible families are aware of, and are able to access, an early childhood program
- complying with the *Inclusion and Equity Policy*
- providing opportunities (in consultation with the Nominated Supervisor and educators) for interested families to attend the service during operational hours to observe the program and become familiar with the service prior to their child commencing in the program
- providing parents/guardians with information about the requirements of the law for enrolment, locating and accessing immunisation services and obtaining the AIR Immunisation History Statement (refer to *Definitions*) required for enrolment
- assessing the child's immunisation documentation as defined by the *Immunisation Enrolment Toolkit for early childhood education and care services* prior to enrolment to determine if the child's vaccination status complies with requirements or whether the child is eligible for the 16-week grace period (refer to *Definitions*)
- ensuring that only children whose AIR Immunisation History Statement (refer to *Definitions*) has been assessed as being acceptable or who are eligible for the grace period (refer to *Definitions*) are able to commence in the program
- taking reasonable steps to obtain an up to date AIR Immunisation History Statement (refer to *Definitions*) from a parent/guardian of a child enrolled under a grace period within 16 weeks from when the child begins attending (Note: the child can continue to attend the service if acceptable immunisation documentation is not obtained).
- taking reasonable steps to obtain an up to date AIR Immunisation History Statement (refer to *Definitions*) from all parents/guardians after enrolment, twice per calendar year, timing reminders to comply with the maximum seven-month interval (Public Health and Wellbeing Regulation 107, Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 Section 143E)
- ensuring that the enrolment record (refer to *Definitions*) complies with the requirements of Regulations 160, 161, 162 and that it effectively meets the management requirements of the service
- ensuring that enrolment records (refer to *Definitions*) are stored in a safe and secure place, and kept for three years after the last date on which the child was educated and cared for by the service (Regulation 183 (1a) (2d))
- ensuring that the orientation program and plans meet the individual needs of children and families, and comply with DET funding criteria
- reviewing the orientation processes for new families and children to ensure the objectives of this policy are met
- ensuring that parents/guardians of a child attending the service can enter the service premises at any time whilst the child is being educated and cared for, except where this may pose a risk to the safety of children or staff, or conflict with any duty of the Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor or educators under the Law (Regulation 157).

Early childhood teachers are responsible for:

- reviewing enrolment applications to identify children with additional needs (refer to *Definitions* and the *Inclusion and Equity Policy*)
- responding to parent/guardian enquiries regarding their child's readiness for the program that they are considering enrolling their child in
- discussing the individual child's needs with parents/guardians and developing an orientation program to assist them to settle into the program
- encouraging parents/guardians to:
 - stay with their child as long as required during the settling in period
 - make contact with educators at the service, when required
- assisting parents/guardians to develop and maintain a routine for saying goodbye to their child
- sharing information with parents/guardians concerning their child's progress with regard to settling in to the service

- discussing support services for children with parents/guardians, where required.

All educators are responsible for:

- responding to enrolment enquiries on a day-to-day basis and referring people to the person responsible for the enrolment process, as required
- providing parents/guardians with information about the requirements of the law for enrolment, locating and accessing immunisation services and obtaining AIR Immunisation History Statement (refer to *Definitions*) required for enrolment
- developing strategies to assist new families to:
 - feel welcomed into the service
 - become familiar with service policies and procedures
 - share information about their family beliefs, values and culture
 - share their understanding of their child's strengths, interests, abilities and needs
 - discuss the values and expectations they hold in relation to their child's learning
- providing comfort and reassurance to children who are showing signs of distress when separating from family members
- complying with the service's *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* in relation to the collection and management of a child's enrolment information

Parents/guardians are responsible for:

- Completing the NERPSA Registration Form and the enrolment form prior to their child's attendance at the service
- Ensuring that all required information is provided to the service
- Updating information by notifying NERPSA and/or the individual service of any changes
- Contacting NERPSA if they wish to cancel their enrolment

6. Evaluation

In order to assess whether this policy has achieved the values and purpose of the policy, NERPSA will:

- seek feedback from everyone affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy
- 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

7. Authorisation

The NERPSA Enrolment Policy was adopted by NERPSA on June 4th 2012.

8. Review date

The NERPSA Enrolment Policy shall be reviewed annually from date of adoption.

Attachments

- Attachment 1: General enrolment procedures for funded kindergarten programs
- Attachment 2: General enrolment procedures for long day care programs

ATTACHMENT 1

General enrolment procedures for funded kindergarten programs

Registration For A Place

- NERPSA will determine the period during which registrations are able to be received for offer of places in the funded kindergarten programs for the following year.
- A separate registration form must be completed for each child, and for each proposed year of attendance at the service.
- To facilitate the inclusion of all children into the program, the registration form should clearly identify any additional or specific needs of the child (refer to *Inclusion and Equity Policy*).
- Completed registration forms are to be forwarded to the NERPSA office
- Access to completed registration forms will be restricted to the person responsible for the enrolment process and staff at the service, unless otherwise specified by NERPSA
- Registrations will be entered on the waiting list using the eligibility and priority of access criteria.
- Registrations received after the closing date will be considered if there are available places, and after all other applicants have been offered a place, in line with the eligibility and priority of access criteria of NERPSA

Offer of Places

- Places will be offered in writing to applicants in accordance with the eligibility and priority of access criteria of the service making clear that confirmation of places is not final until an up to date AIR Immunisation History Statement has been received, assessed and found acceptable.
- NERPSA requires parents/guardians who have been offered a place to provide an up to date AIR Immunisation History Statement for assessment two months prior to the child first attending the service in order that a confirmed place can be offered.
- Parents/guardians who **do not** have an up to date AIR Immunisation History Statement and whose child is **not** eligible for the grace period are unable to commence at a service until acceptable documentation is provided
- Parents/guardians who do not wish to accept the offer of a place, or intend to withdraw their enrolment, are requested to notify NERPSA in writing as soon as possible.
- First term fees will be payable on acceptance of a place. This fee will not be required if children are eligible for the fee subsidy (refer to NERPSA Fees Policy)
- An enrolment form and other relevant information will be provided by the individual service to the parent/guardian after a confirmed place has been accepted and the fee has been paid.
 - ~ Where the individual service provides more than one funded kindergarten program, places within the programs will be allocated by the individual service after confirmation of acceptance of a place.

NOTE: Places will not be allocated to children until any outstanding fees owed to NERPSA by the family is paid, or a payment plan is agreed to between the family and NERPSA (refer to *Fees Policy*).

Eligibility And Priority Of Access Criteria For Funded Kindergarten Programs

The following children are eligible for attendance in funded kindergarten programs:

- Children who turn three years of age by 30 April in the year they will attend funded three-year-old kindergarten (two years before they attend school). A child must have turned three before beginning to attend the service
- Children who turn four years of age by 30 April in the year they will attend funded four-year old kindergarten (one year before they attend school)

NOTE: For children born between 1 January and 30 April, parents have a choice about whether they commence school in the year they turn five, or in the following year when they turn six.

They can therefore choose whether they commence four-year-old Kindergarten in the year they turn four or the year they turn five and three-year-old Kindergarten in the year they turn three or the year they turn four

- Children who have been granted approval to receive funding for a second year of four-year-old kindergarten
- Children turning six years of age in their year at kindergarten who have been granted an exemption from school-entry age requirements by their regional office of the DET (Refer to DET Victorian Kindergarten policy, procedures and funding criteria)

- Children who are younger than the eligible age, but whose parents/guardians have submitted a written request for their child to attend school the following year to their regional office of the DET, or the non-government school their child will be attending (a copy of the written request and DET approval must be attached with the registration)

NOTE: Parents/guardians are to be advised that very few requests are approved by DET. If the child attends kindergarten early, but does not proceed on to school the following year, the child will be unable to access another year unless they are funded by DET for a second year

- Three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children known to Child Protection have an ability to attend up to 15 hours a week of a funded early childhood program planned and delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher (Early Start Kindergarten program).

First priority of access is given to:

- Children at risk of abuse or neglect, including children in Out of Home Care
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children
- Children with additional needs
- Children eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy

Second priority of access is given to:

- Children who have received funding for a second year of Kindergarten
- Children who have had siblings attend their preferred Kindergarten
- Children whose nearest kindergarten to their place of residence is a rural kindergarten (Glenrowan, Moyhu, Whorouly and Chiltern will be given priority of access to that rural kindergarten).

Remaining places will be allocated by ballot.

Exceptional circumstances that require consideration beyond the eligibility and priority of access criteria should be made in writing and will be reviewed by NERPSA on a case-by-case basis.

NOTE: Priority of Access guidelines are to ensure that kindergarten programs are available to those children who stand to benefit the most from attending early education. In mixed age groups, guidelines will equally prioritise three and four-year-old children for first priority of access. Where programs for three- and four-year old children are provided separately, the priority of access criteria will be applied separately for each age cohort.

Immunisation information

In order to be offered a place at a Kindergarten, Victorian legislation which commenced on January 1, 2016 requires that a child must be:

- Fully immunised or up-to-date according to the Immunisation Schedule Victoria; or
- On a catch-up vaccination schedule; or
- Has a medical condition prevented them from being vaccinated.

An immunisation status certificate will be required to accompany the Registration Form in order for the enrolment to be considered. The required certificate from the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register (ACIR) can be requested at any time by contacting Medicare:

- Phone 1800 653 809
- Email acir@medicareaustralia.gov.au
- Visit the Medicare website
- Visit your local Medicare office

If the required certificate is unable to be provided, options will need to be discussed with NERPSA as to the enrolment registration. If a child's next vaccinations are due up to two months before Kindergarten commences, a new immunisation status certificate is required to be provided to NERPSA before the child is able to commence.

ATTACHMENT 2

General enrolment procedures for long day care programs

- Enrolments are accepted at any time.
- Enrolment forms are available from the individual service
- To facilitate the inclusion of all children into the program, enrolment forms should clearly identify any additional or specific needs of the child (refer to *Inclusion and Equity Policy*).
- Completed enrolment forms are to be forwarded to person responsible for the enrolment process at the service
- Access to completed enrolment forms will be restricted to the person responsible for the enrolment process and staff at the service, unless otherwise specified by NERPSA

Offer of places

- Places will be offered if vacancies are available, as soon as possible after enrolment
- If places are not available, the enrolment will be placed on a waiting list and offered in accordance with the priority of access criteria.

Priority of access criteria

- Children at risk of abuse or neglect, including children in Out of Home Care
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children
- Children with additional needs
- Families who are currently enrolled at the service
- Order of receipt

Immunisation information

In order to be offered a place at a Kindergarten, Victorian legislation which commenced on January 1, 2016 requires that a child must be:

- Fully immunised or up-to-date according to the Immunisation Schedule Victoria; or
- On a catch-up vaccination schedule; or
- Has a medical condition prevented them from being vaccinated.

An immunisation status certificate will be required to accompany the Registration Form in order for the enrolment to be considered. The required certificate from the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register (ACIR) can be requested at any time by contacting Medicare:

- Phone 1800 653 809
- Email acir@medicareaustralia.gov.au
- Visit the Medicare website
- Visit your local Medicare office

If the required certificate is unable to be provided, options will need to be discussed with NERPSA as to the enrolment registration.