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Best Start
Best Life

Delivering Pre-Prep to children from priority cohorts

This guide is to assist services deliver additional Pre-Prep hours to children from priority cohorts. It includes what to consider with program models at your service to maximise outcomes for children. Please note that if your service started Pre-Prep in 2025 and is delivering more than 25 hours each week, some of the information may not be as applicable.

Introduction

From 2026, all Victorian funded early childhood education services will start to deliver Pre-Prep to eligible children from priority cohorts across the state.

Evidence shows 2 years of early childhood education has a stronger positive effect on children who need extra support, giving them more time to deepen their learning experience with teachers and educators (see [The evidence behind 2 years and more time in kindergarten](#) for more information about the benefits of 2 years of kindergarten and increased hours in the year before school).

Pre-Prep will launch to eligible children from priority cohort groups in 2026 and 2028.



2026 and 2028 priority cohort groups

Eligibility information

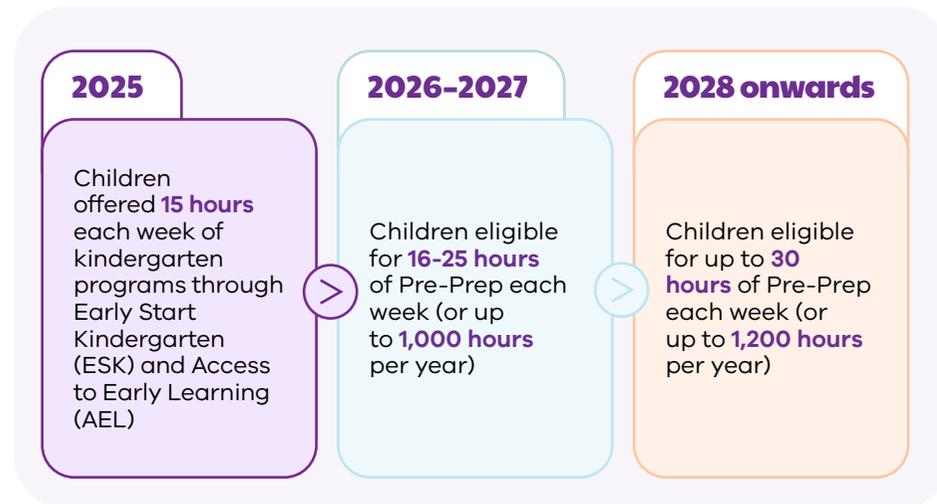
2026 Pre-Prep priority cohort group

From 2026, between 16 and 25 hours of Pre-Prep will be available to:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- children from a refugee or asylum seeker background
- children who have had contact with Child Protection
- children who were supported by Early Start Kindergarten or Access to Early Learning in their Three-Year-Old Kindergarten year.

Pre-Prep hours for this group of priority cohort children increase to up to 30 hours from 2028.

Figure 1: 2026 Pre-Prep priority cohort group roll-out



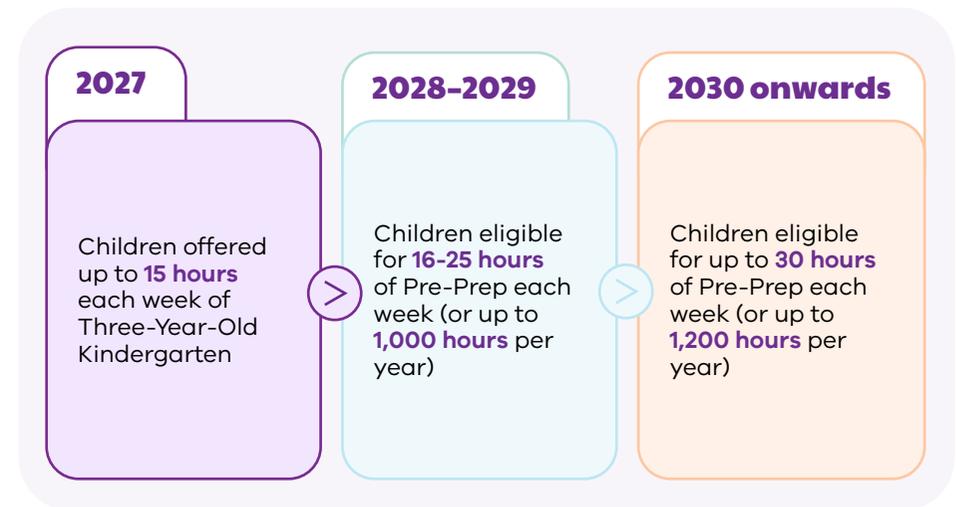
Plan for how your service will deliver Pre-Prep to a child from a priority cohort from 2026 onwards, even if you do not have any current enrolments of eligible children (i.e., Early Start Kindergarten or Access to Early Learning).

2028 Pre-Prep priority cohort group

From 2028, between 16 and 25 hours of Pre-Prep will be available to:

- children who have (or have a parent or guardian who has) a Commonwealth concession card
- children from a multiple birth family (triplets or more).

Figure 2: 2028 Pre-Prep priority cohort group roll-out



Pre-Prep hours for this group of priority cohort children increase to up to 30 hours from 2030. Services are encouraged to offer children from priority cohorts as many funded kindergarten hours as possible, up to the maximum of funded hours specified. In the first 2 years of each priority group rollout, as Figures 1 and 2 show, this is 25 hours.

Supporting positive outcomes for children

Evidence shows that early childhood education programs must be high quality to achieve a significant, long-lasting impact on children. The way programs are structured contributes to this quality, as well as children's learning, development and wellbeing outcomes.

When your service is planning program model changes as you start to deliver increased hours of Pre-Prep, continue to think about teaching and learning at your service how you do now, with the [Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework \(VEYLDF\)](#) as your guide.

The Practice Principles in the VEYLDF describe the best ways to work together, and with children and families, to facilitate learning and development. An important resource for planning changes and monitoring their impact will be your [Quality Improvement Plan \(QIP\)](#).

There are different ways services can structure programs to deliver additional hours for children from priority cohorts. Remember, children from a priority cohort do not need to be placed in the same group and can access their Pre-Prep hours in more than one group at a single service, including 4-year-old groups, multi-age — and where appropriate — 3-year-old groups.

Consider what will work best for the children and families that use your service and your local community, alongside your workforce and the requirements of your service type.

You can use the ['What to consider' section](#) to assist your service consider how effective a program model may be. [The Example scenario](#) also shows how a service may apply these considerations.

While some services will have one or more children from a priority cohort accessing Pre-Prep from 2026, this won't be the case for all services. It is useful for services, no matter how many enrolments of children from a priority cohort are expected, to familiarise themselves with the priority group rollouts and what to consider.



What to consider – Program models

Reflect and think about ...

Quality

How the program model sets children up to achieve the Early Years Learning and Development Outcomes of the VEYLDF, which apply equally to 3- and 4-year-old children, including children from priority cohorts. It may be useful to consider your service's QIP and the National Quality Standards.

Service philosophy

How the program model reflects the context of your service and incorporates the beliefs, goals, commitments, aspirations and intentions of those who belong to your service community.

Inclusion and diversity

How the program model promotes access, meaningful participation and positive outcomes, taking into account all children's social, cultural and linguistic diversity.

Privacy

How the program model protects privacy of families and children, and the handling of confidential information, including eligibility for Pre-Prep and Early Start Kindergarten.

Funding

How the program model complies with funding obligations and supports ongoing financial viability for your service.

Team teaching

How the program model supports the team to embed consistent practices and use teaching strategies that support the engagement of children.

Family engagement

How the program model can be explained to families — e.g. is it familiar, what are the benefits — and incorporates any of their feedback, if received.

Questions for reflective discussion

The launch of Pre-Prep is an exciting opportunity to improve outcomes for Victorian children, and for teaching teams to learn and develop their practice. The below questions may assist your service to work out the best program model to deliver more hours to children from priority cohorts.

How can the program support continuity of learning and effective transitions? Will some new routines need to be designed?

- How will the teaching team work together to design and deliver consistent educational programs and teaching strategies that meet a child's learning needs across multiple groups?
- How will the teaching team share information about children's learning and development where they are attending multiple groups?
- How can we make sure the child's program includes a balance between calm, restful experiences and more active experiences, both indoors and outdoors?

How can we sustain relationships with children and teachers and educators they are likely to come across in delivering the program?

- How will you ensure a sense of belonging, and seek to understand a child and family's experience?
- How will your approach be sensitive and responsive to families whose engagement may be impacted by distress related to stressful or traumatic experiences or by a sense of judgement from others?
- What supports/considerations need to be made to ensure a sense of belonging for the child if they are accessing their program through different groups?

How can we work with families to support the development and wellbeing of their child?

- How will teachers develop and maintain relationships with families and how will families be provided with opportunities to contribute to decisions?

How can the program support the individual and learning needs and preferences of the child? How can children's strengths be extended, and which areas might benefit from the additional focus or support that more time allows?

- Which tools will be used to guide assessment for learning, e.g., **Early Years Assessment and Learning Tool**? How will you compare and moderate your assessment observations alongside those of colleagues?
- What supports/considerations need to be made to ensure shared educational program design and reflection?

How will your program foster positive social relationships? How will priority cohort children be supported to develop social skills and form friendships with a range of other children?

- How will your service support children to get to know children in a group for fewer days than other children in the group?

You can find more reflective questions in the **'Your Guide To' information sheets on multi-age groups, rotational models, team teaching and teaching longer days.**

Planning to deliver more hours to priority cohort children from 2026

As your service looks to how it will deliver Pre-Prep to children from priority cohorts, these steps may assist.

1. Consider 2025 ESK enrolments and other sources

As children from the 2026 Pre-Prep priority cohort group are eligible for **Early Start Kindergarten** now, ESK enrolments in 2025 may be a good indicator for your service about how many children will be enrolling in Pre-Prep in 2026. Let these families know about Pre-Prep and that they are eligible for programs with additional hours from 2026.

Also, connect with your local **Maternal Child and Health (MCH) service**, Central Registration and Enrolment Scheme (CRES) teams at local councils, or local family services that are working with children that may be eligible for Pre-Prep.

2. Share information with your team

It may be helpful for your teaching team to look at the **Operational policies supporting the Best Start, Best Life reforms** that apply from 2026. This lists the policies relating to delivering Pre-Prep to children from priority cohorts (there is also a **FAQ document** available).

3. Meet and discuss options for delivering additional hours with your team

Services may find that the approaches they have already been using to deliver ESK can also be applied for children eligible for Pre-Prep in 2026. As well as the information in this guide, you can also refer to the **Change Management Toolkit**, which has advice about planning for and the benefits of different program models and tips on communicating with families.



4. Invite families of 3-year-old children enrolled in Early Start Kindergarten to provide feedback on options

When asking for input, offer different ways to provide feedback, for example via email, anonymous form, or in-person meeting. This offer can be extended to relevant family support workers (e.g., Child Protection case workers, CALD Outreach Workers), where appropriate.

Discuss with families and support workers opportunities that the additional hours might offer in working with any challenges that are associated with traumatic or stressful experiences.

5. Reconvene with your teaching team

Discuss any feedback received by families and agree on the preferred option for your service. Now is a good time to get advice from your Early Childhood Improvement Branch (ECIB), if you haven't already.

You may also consider, and discuss with your ECIB, ideas and options for how you can use your **School Readiness Funding** to build the capacity of your team to support children from priority cohorts and improve outcomes for children at your service.

6. Let families know of the proposed program

This may include providing families with options before or whilst enrolments are open. Let families know they can get in touch with any questions or requests before enrolment and during the year. If required, **free onsite, telephone and video interpreters** are available for funded kindergarten services and can help your service provide families with information and support them to provide feedback and ask questions.

Note that different types of support and engagement may be required for families and children from a priority cohort as they start to access and participate in increased hours of Pre-Prep.



Example scenario – Exploring program options for children from priority cohorts

Brilliant Bears Kindergarten has 3 priority cohorts enrolments for 2026. Two of these children attended 15 hours of Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) at the service in 2025, and the third child is from a family who moved from interstate and was told by their MCH nurse of their eligibility for Pre-Prep because they meet one of the **priority cohort criteria**.

There are 25 children enrolled in each Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten, with 15 hours being delivered to both age groups in 2026. Brilliant Bears Kindergarten is a single room service with a maximum group size of 22. The service uses a rotational model for its Three- and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten programs and is moving to multi-age groupings from next year. There will be 6 groups: 3 x 3YO groups and 3 x 4YO groups and programs will be for 7.5 hours.

The 2 children accessing ESK in 2025 are receiving 15 hours in the Three-Year-Old Kindergarten program, but in different groups.

The Committee of Management and Leadership Team meet to brainstorm options for providing additional hours to the 3 priority cohort children. The following ideas are put forward – see Figure 3.

Figure 3 — Brilliant Bears program model options



They all agree that small groups (Option 3) may not be financially viable for the service. It is also noted that this style of program delivery may not have opportunities for children to interact with their peers and develop social skills and make friends. (Note information in sidebar for additional considerations around small group sizes).

It is also agreed that having staggered start or finish times (Option 2) will increase the visibility of children from priority cohorts. It may also impact the child’s sense of belonging and peer relationships.

The Committee and Leadership Team agree the preferred approach is for children from priority cohorts to be offered 22.5 hours of Pre-Prep with 3 x 7.5-hour days (Option 1).

Small group sizes

While delivering additional hours to small groups is unlikely to be a preferred option at services from a funding perspective, there may be some circumstances where this option is worth exploring further. This includes when a particular need or benefit is identified for a child or small group of children — for example, children with poor attachment histories or who have experienced trauma.

Smaller groups may provide some children with more comfort, support and safety. It may also give a teacher enhanced opportunities to better understand the learning needs of a child, and provide intentional teaching and support based around children’s specific goals.

There may also be increased opportunities in small group settings for deeper engagement with families and support workers. If a smaller group is preferred, it is important to balance the child’s privacy and inclusion within the broader service.

Example scenario

Table 1: Program model considerations

What to consider	Quality	Service philosophy	Inclusion and diversity	Privacy	Funding	Team teaching	Family engagement
Option 1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Option 2	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓
Option 3	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓

Option 2 and 3 have some strengths and weaknesses, as shown in Table 1 above. Option 1 however, meets all parts of Brilliant Bears Kindergarten’s philosophy and is fully compliant and financially viable. The program model supports the inclusion of children from priority cohorts who are receiving more funded hours than their peers. It will provide a quality program that has stability and exposure to different groups. Families are familiar with how a rotational model works and will be given flexibility and choice to what days they attend. For example, families could choose for their child to attend on Wednesday and Thursday with the same 4YO group, and a different 4YO group on the Tuesday or Friday.

The service also wants to explore if it can increase its licensed places in 2027 so it can potentially offer longer hours for all 4-year-old children. This would provide families with children not eligible for Pre-Prep the choice to access 15 hours of Free Kinder or to pay a fee for additional hours, while eligible priority cohort children continue to receive a fully funded free program.

Further actions from this discussion include:

- Review and update Quality Improvement Plan
- Implement a Risk Management Plan
- Review School Readiness Funding plan to support teaching team
- Enrol Educational Leader in Victorian Educational Leadership Program (VELP) when open
- Enrol teaching team in **Early Year Assessment and Learning Tool (EYALT) Online Professional Learning**.

Because the service is moving to multi-age groups from 2026, the **EYALT** will be used to monitor learning outcomes.

Where to get more help

Early Childhood Improvement Branches (ECIB) — Contact your ECIB for tailored advice. This may be particularly helpful if you have current or projected enrolments of eligible children (i.e., Early Start Kindergarten or Access to Early Learning), or there are families at your service who think additional Pre-Prep hours won't suit their circumstances.



Further resources

- **Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF)** — outlines the Practice Principles, Early Years Learning and Development Outcomes, and information about supporting transitions. All Pre-Prep program models should be designed with these front of mind.
- **Change Management Toolkit** — information and tools to help services work with their team and families to plan and implement Pre-Prep and continue Three-Year-Old Kindergarten.
- **'Your Guide To' information sheets (Multi-age groups, Rotational models, Teaching longer days, Team teaching)** — advice about planning for and the benefits of particular program models, questions for reflective discussion and tips on communicating with families.
- **Quality Improvement Plans** — includes QIP template, information about developing and reviewing your QIP, and self-assessment tool.
- **Four-Year-Old Kindergarten is becoming Pre-Prep** — information about Pre-Prep and the roll-out schedule. There is a calculator families can use to check their child's eligibility for Pre-Prep.
- **Early Start Kindergarten** — information about ESK, including translated brochures.
- **Koorie Kids Shine** — information and videos about the benefits of kindergarten for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and cultural safety at kindergarten.
- **Supporting CALD families to engage in kindergarten** — resources and programs to support communication with CALD families about kindergarten and its benefits, including in-language videos, a Community Event toolkit and information on the CALD Outreach Initiative.
- **Foundation House Early Years Program** — resources on identifying and building partnerships with families from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds.
- **fka Children's Services (fkaCS)** — resources on engaging multilingual children in early childhood education, including eLearning series 'Engaging with multilingual families about kindergarten'.

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