

FEES POLICY

Mandatory – Quality Area 7

Ashwood Children's Centre's Commitment to Child Safety

All children who come to Ashwood Children's Centre have a right to feel and be safe. The physical, emotional and socio-cultural welfare of the children in our care will always be our first priority and we have a zero tolerance to child abuse and/or harm to children. We aim to create a child safe and child friendly environment where all children, including indigenous children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, and children living with a disability, feel safe and have fun.

PURPOSE

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- the setting, payment and collection of fees
- ensuring the viability of Ashwood Children's Centre, by setting appropriate fees and charges
- the equitable and non-discriminatory application of fees across the programs provided by Ashwood Children's Centre

POLICY STATEMENT

1. VALUES

Ashwood Children's Centre is committed to:

- providing responsible financial management of the service, including establishing fees that will result in a financially viable service, while keeping user fees at the lowest possible level
- providing a fair and manageable system for dealing with non-payment and/or inability to pay fees/outstanding debts
- ensuring there are no financial barriers for families wishing to access an early childhood program for their child/children
- maintaining confidentiality in relation to the financial circumstances of parents/guardians
- advising users of the service about program funding, including government support and fees to be paid by parents/guardians
- providing equitable access for families eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to the Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, Certified Supervisor, educators and parents/guardians with an enrolled child, or who wish to enroll a child, at Ashwood Children's Centre.

3. BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

Background

Ashwood Children's Centre offers two types of attendances for the education and care programs implemented within the service. Long day care attendances are offered for children aged three months to four years of age, whilst long day Kindergarten and sessional Kindergarten are offered for children attending the funded four year old Kindergarten program, in the year prior to commencing

primary school. Long day care/Kindergarten attendance and sessional Kindergarten attendance attract different fee schedules as outlined below.

The Centre is registered for Child Care Benefit (CCB), meaning that families are able to test their eligibility through the Family Assistance Office; once approved, parents will need to provide both theirs and their child's Customer Reference Numbers (CRNs) and their date of birth, which will be used to determine any CCB fee reduction eligibility. Further information about CCB is available on the Federal [Department of Human Services \(DHS\) website](#). Families may also be eligible for the Child Care Rebate (CCR); further information about this is also available at the Federal [DHS website](#)

There will be changes to child care assistance from 2 July 2018. Read more about the [New Child Care Package](#) on the Federal Department of Education and Training (DET) website.

The State Department of Education and Training (DET) provide per capita funding as a contribution towards the costs of running, staffing and managing the funded four-year-old kindergarten program. Income from other sources, primarily fees, is required to meet all the additional costs incurred by the service in the delivery of the children's program. In addition, the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (refer to *Definitions*) enables eligible families to attend the four-year-old kindergarten program at minimal or no cost.

DET also funds eligible three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection, to access kindergarten programs as outlined in the *Kindergarten Funding Guide* (refer to *Sources*).

DET requires that funded services have a comprehensive written fees policy in place, and the content of this policy must be communicated to families. The policy must include a written statement about the fees to be charged, as required under Regulation 168(2)(n), and the payment process. All families must be informed of applicable term and annual fees at the time of enrolment.

Services must also advise eligible families of the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy arrangements. The fees charged must comply with the *Kindergarten Funding Guide* (refer to *Definitions*), and be responsive to the local community and the viability of the service. The *Kindergarten Funding Guide* (refer to *Sources*) outlines the criteria to be covered in the Fees policy.

Whilst fees are usually reviewed at the conclusion of the Centre's financial year (September 30th), the Committee of Management reserves the right to review the fees charged as required, and to adjust accordingly giving the families' four (4) weeks written notice prior to changing the fee amount charged.

Legislation and standards

Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006* (Vic), as amended 2011
- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic), as amended 2012
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth)
- *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010*
- *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011*: Regulation 168(2)(n)

- *Equal Opportunity Act 1995* (Vic)
- *National Quality Standard*, Quality Area 7: Leadership and Service Management
 - Standard 7.3: Administrative systems enable the effective management of a quality service

4. DEFINITIONS

Approved care: Care given by a service provider that has been approved by the Family Assistance Office to receive Child Care Benefit payments on behalf of eligible families. Most long day care, family day care, before-and-after school care, vacation care, some occasional care and some in-home care childcare services are approved providers.

Child Care Benefit (CCB): A Commonwealth Government payment to help families who use either approved or registered childcare services. All eligible families can receive some Child Care Benefit.

Child Care Rebate (CCR): A Commonwealth Government payment to assist families with the out-of-pocket costs of using approved or registered childcare services. Families must have the CCB eligibility tested before being eligible for the CCR; once eligibility has been tested, families may receive up to 50% of their out-of-pocket childcare expenses as a rebate.

Early Start Kindergarten: A funding program that enables three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection to attend a kindergarten program that is planned and delivered by an early childhood teacher for a specific number of hours.

Enrolment application fee: A payment to cover administrative costs associated with the processing of a child's enrolment application for a place in a program at the service.

Excursion/service event charge: An additional charge required to meet the cost of special events or excursions that occur in response to emerging children's program needs. Events that are planned ahead and are included as an expenditure item in the service's budget does not incur this additional charge (refer to *Excursions and Service Events Policy*).

Fees: A charge for a place within a program at the service.

Health Care Card: A Commonwealth Government entitlement providing concessions for low-income earners and other eligible people.

Kindergarten fee deposit: A charge to secure a place that has been offered in a program at the service. This is deducted from term fees.

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS): A state government subsidy **paid directly to the funded service** to enable eligible families to attend a funded kindergarten program or funded three-year-old place at no cost (or minimal cost) to promote participation

Kindergarten Funding Guide: Provides operational guidelines for services administering the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy.

Late collection charge: A charge that may be imposed by the Approved Provider when parents/guardians are late to collect their child/children from the program (refer to Attachment 1 – Fee information for families).

Registered care: Care provided by nannies, grandparents, relatives or friends, individuals working within kindergartens, occasional care services and outside school hours care services that are registered with the Family Assistance Office. Eligible families can receive some reimbursement of costs when using a registered care provider.

Voluntary parent/guardian contribution: A voluntary payment for items not directly related to the provision of the children's program. Attendance at the service is not conditional on this payment.

5. SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

Sources

- [Kindergarten Funding Guide](#)
- The constitution of Ashwood Children's Centre

Service policies

- *Complaints and Grievances Policy*
- *Delivery and Collection of Children Policy*
- *Enrolment and Orientation Policy*
- *Excursions and Service Events Policy*
- *Inclusion and Equity Policy*
- *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy*

PROCEDURES

The Approved Provider (Committee of Management of Ashwood Children's Centre) is responsible for:

- reviewing the current budget to determine fee income requirements
- developing a fee policy that balances the parent's/guardian's capacity to pay, with providing a high-quality program and maintaining service viability
- implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with parents/guardians, the Nominated Supervisor and educators, and for sessional Kindergarten fees in line with the requirements of DET's *Kindergarten Funding Guide* (refer to *Sources*)
- ensuring that this policy is based on the principles of the *Kindergarten Funding Guide* (refer to *Definitions*)
- considering any issues regarding fees that may be a barrier to families enrolling at Ashwood Children's Centre and removing those barriers wherever possible
- reviewing the number of families experiencing financial hardship and the effectiveness of the procedures for late payment and support offered
- considering options for payment when affordability is an issue for families
- clearly communicating this policy and payment options to families in a culturally-sensitive way, and in the family's first language where possible
- providing all parents/guardians with a copy of the document containing fee information for families (refer to Attachment 1)
- providing all parents/guardians with a statement of fees and charges (refer to schedule in Attachment 2) upon enrolment of their child, and ensure that the *Fees Policy* is readily accessible at the service (Regulation 171)
- complying with the service's *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of fees
- notifying parents/guardians within 28 days of any proposed changes to the fees charged or the way in which the fees are collected (Regulation 172(2))

- ensuring a notice outlining fees charged by the service is displayed prominently in the main entrance to Ashwood Children's Centre.

The Nominated Supervisor (Centre Manager) is responsible for:

- assisting the Approved Provider in developing this policy, and ensuring that this policy is based on the principles of the *Kindergarten Funding Guide* (refer to *Definitions*)
- implementing and reviewing this policy, in consultation with parents/guardians, the Approved Provider and educators, and in line with the requirements of DET's *Kindergarten Funding Guide* (refer to *Sources*)
- considering any issues regarding fees that may be a barrier to families enrolling at Ashwood Children's Centre and removing those barriers wherever possible
- considering options for payment when affordability is an issue for families
- communicating this policy and payment options to families in a culturally-sensitive way and in the family's first language where possible
- providing all parents/guardians with a copy of the document containing fee information for families (refer to Attachment 1)
- providing all parents/guardians with a statement of fees and charges (refer to schedule in Attachment 2) upon enrolment of their child, and ensure that the *Fees Policy* is readily accessible at the service (Regulation 171)
- collecting and receipting all fees
- collecting all relevant information and maintaining relevant documents regarding those with entitlement to concessions, where applicable
- complying with the service's *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of fees
- notifying parents/guardians within 28 days of any proposed changes to the fees charged or the way in which the fees are collected (Regulation 172(2))
- ensuring a notice outlining fees charged by the service is displayed prominently in the main entrance to Ashwood Children's Centre.

Certified Supervisors and other educators are responsible for:

- informing the Nominated Supervisor and/or Approved Provider of any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service
- referring parents'/guardians' questions in relation to this policy to the Nominated Supervisor and/or Approved Provider
- assisting the Nominated Supervisor and/or Approved Provider, as required, in sighting supporting documentation for access to the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy.

Parents/guardians are responsible for:

- reading the Ashwood Children's Centre Fee information for families (refer to Attachment 1) and the Schedule of Fees and Charges (refer to Attachment 2[and 3])
- notifying the Nominated Supervisor if experiencing difficulties with the payment of fees
- providing the required documentation to enable the service to claim the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy for eligible families (refer to Attachment 1 – Fee information for families).

EVALUATION

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the Approved Provider will:

- regularly seek feedback from everyone affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness, particularly in relation to affordability, flexibility of payment options and procedures for the collection of fees
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy
- monitor the number of families/children excluded from the service because of their inability to pay fees
- 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
- notify parents/guardians at least 14 days before making any changes to this policy or its procedures (Regulation 172(2)).

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: Fees Policy Acknowledgement Statement for Educators
- Attachment 2: Fee information for families
- Attachment 3: Statement of Fees and Charges – Fee schedule – Ashwood Children's Centre

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the Approved Provider of Ashwood Children's Centre on November 2017.

REVIEW DATE: NOVEMBER 2018

ATTACHMENT 1

Fees Policy Acknowledgement Statement for Educators

I hereby acknowledge that on <insert date> I received a copy of the *Fees Policy* for Ashwood Children's Centre.

I have read this policy, I understand its contents and I agree to abide by the principles, practices and consequences set out within.

I understand that a signed copy of this acknowledgement will be kept on my employment record while I am working at the service, and will be disposed of when my employment has ceased.

Signature

Name (please print)

Date

Committee of Management
Signature

Name (please print)

Date

ATTACHMENT 1

Fee information for families

Ashwood Children's Centre 2017

1. Why sessional Kindergarten fees are necessary

The Department of Education and Training (DET) provides per capita funding as a contribution toward the costs of providing a four-year-old kindergarten program. Services meet the balance of costs through charging fees and fundraising activities.

DET provides a Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (see below) that enables children from eligible families to attend a four-year-old kindergarten program free of charge, or at a minimal cost.

DET also provides funding to assist eligible three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection, to access kindergarten programs.

Ashwood Children's Centre provides a range of support options to parents/guardians experiencing difficulty with payment of fees (see below).

2. How fees are set

As part of the budget development process, the Committee of Management of Ashwood Children's Centre sets fees each year for the programs of the service, taking into consideration:

- the financial viability of the service
- the level of government funding provided for the program, including the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy
- the availability of other income sources, such as grants
- the fees charged by similar services in the area
- the capacity of parents/guardians to pay fees
- reasonable expenditure in meeting agreed program quality and standards
- requirements of [Kindergarten Funding Guide](#)

Whilst fees are usually reviewed at the conclusion of the Centre's financial year (September 30th), the Committee of Management reserves the right to review the fees charged as required, and to adjust accordingly giving the families' four (4) weeks written notice prior to changing the fee amount charged.

3. Other charges

Other charges levied by Ashwood Children's Centre are included on the Schedule of Fees. These include:

- **Kindergarten fee deposit:** This payment secures a child's place at the service and is payable on acceptance of enrolment. The deposit is retained as part payment on term fees. Families eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (see below) are required to pay a reduced deposit of \$5.00. Families experiencing hardship should also discuss any difficulties with the service.
- **Excursion/service event charge:** This additional charge is required to cover the cost of **specific excursions** that Ashwood Children's Centre believes are of immense importance for children's involvement, learning and/or growth and development. Such specific excursions/events include (but are not limited to) children's vision and hearing screening, Kindergarten visit to the Casey Safety Village. Whenever a fee is charge for incursions/excursions Ashwood Children's Centre educators will provide families with detailed information about the relevance of the event, and options for families' and children's involvement in the event. At all times, Ashwood Children's

Centre will subsidise children's involvement, with families charged a nominal amount for their child's participation (refer to *Excursions and Service Events Policy*).

- **Voluntary maintenance levy:** The participation of parents/guardians is encouraged by the service and can help to keep costs more affordable. However not all families are able to assist at the service. A refundable levy system has been introduced by the service and replaces voluntary labour with paid labour. Payment will be refunded upon written request to parents/guardians with or without participation in specified activities such as working bees, maintenance and gardening etc. Eligible concession card holders will not be charged this levy. The levy is not intended to be a barrier to participation and families experiencing difficulties should discuss this with the Centre.
- **Late collection charge:** The Committee of Management of Ashwood Children's Centre has implemented a late collection charge when parents/guardians are late in collecting a child from the service. This charge is set out on the Centre's Schedule of Fees, and will be charged to parent's accounts a week after the late collection of their child.

4. Fundraising

Not all service costs are covered by DET per capita funding and the fees charged. Fundraising is undertaken to meet the balance and/or pay for additional items for the service. While participation in fundraising is voluntary, the support of every family is encouraged. Fundraising activities are also an opportunity for families and communities to come together.

5. Subsidies

5.1 Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (four-year-old programs only)

The Kindergarten Fee Subsidy is provided by DET to the service and enables eligible children to attend kindergarten free of charge or at minimal cost. Eligibility conditions change from time-to-time – contact the service for further information.

Families who may be eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (four-year-old programs only) include those who are:

- Health Care Card holders
- Pensioner Concession Card holders
- Department of Veterans' Affairs Gold Card holders
- Temporary Protection/Humanitarian Visas 447, 451, 785 or 786
- Asylum seekers on Bridging Visas A–F
- Refugee and Special Humanitarian Visa 200–217
- Resolution of Status (RoS) visa, Class CD, subclass 851
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children
- triplets or quadruplets attending a funded kindergarten program in the same year.

Supporting documentation must be sighted by the service on acceptance of a place or on commencement in the program. Families are eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy for the full term in which their concession is valid. Contact the service for further information.

5.2 Early Start Kindergarten fee subsidy

Three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children known to Child Protection are eligible to attend a funded early childhood program that is planned and delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher free of charge. The service receives funding for children who meet the eligibility criteria. Contact the service for further information.

5.3 Child Care Benefit (CCB)

Child Care Benefit (CCB) is an Australian Government payment that can assist eligible families with the [costs of childcare](#) at an approved or registered care provider. Ashwood Children's Centre is an approved care provider with the Family Assistance Office (FAO).

In accordance with the [CCB rules](#), a child who does not attend on their first booked day of attendance and/or their last booked day of attendance will be charged full fees without access to any eligible CCB or CCR fee subsidy.

Ashwood Children's Centre does not offer discounted fees for children absent from the Centre on holidays, as families are paying to maintain the booked days of attendance for their child when they return. [CCB rules](#) also apply to families travelling on extended holidays (6 weeks or longer) outside Australia. Once a child has been absent for 6 weeks or longer overseas, families will receive notification from the FAO that their CCB / CCR eligibility has been cancelled. If families return within 13 weeks of their departure date from Australia, the CCB / CCR eligibility will be reinstated automatically. If families return 13 weeks or longer after their departure date from Australia, a new claim for CCR / CCB will need to be made.

6. Payment of fees

The Committee of Management will regularly review payment options and procedures to ensure that they are inclusive and sensitive to families' cultural and financial situations.

Long day care/Long day Kindergarten fees will be invoiced to parents/guardians directly at the beginning of each week; parent account must be maintained with fees paid a week in advance, with fees due and payable by Friday 6.00pm of the week prior to the booked attendance. Each invoice will be accompanied by payment instructions, including bank details for direct deposit into the Centre's bank account, whilst cash and cheque payments can be placed into the Centre's fees boxes

The Centre is currently investigating options for direct debit as the only method of payment for children's fees (after a phase in period). Further information will be provided, with payment instructions in the coming month.

For sessional Kindergarten positions, the first term's fees must be received in full prior to the end of the previous year of the child commencing at the service. Subsequent term fees will be invoiced to families two weeks prior to the end of the previous term, with fees due on the final day of the previous term (i.e., term 2 fees will be charged two weeks prior to the end of term 1, and are due on the final day of term 1).

Parents/guardians experiencing difficulty in paying fees are requested to contact the Nominated Supervisor to arrange a suitable alternative payment plan. The *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* of the service will be complied with at all times in relation to a family's financial/personal circumstances.

7. Unpaid fees

If fees are not paid by the due date, the following steps will be taken.

- **One week overdue:** An initial 'account overdue' reminder email will be sent to parents/guardians.
- **Two weeks overdue:** Where payment is still not received, families will be sent an electronic/hard copy letter, requesting payment of the overdue amount, and their weekly fee, by Friday 6.00pm.
- **Three weeks overdue:** Where payment is still not received, families will be sent an electronic and a hard copy letter, and have a \$5.00 late account fee charged to their account, with the request to

pay the overdue amount, plus weekly fee, plus late account fee by Friday 6.00pm. Parents / guardians are also advised of the need to contact the Nominated Supervisor (Centre Manager) to discuss payment options, or strategies for maintaining their account with fees paid a week in advance.

- **Four weeks overdue, Failure to contact the Centre and continued non-payment of fees** will result in the overdue fee situation being referred to the Committee of Management for a decision – such decisions may include: contacting the service within a specific time frame and signing onto a developed payment plan, consideration of financial assistance and/or the provision of [Special Child Care Benefit](#) (SCCB), withdrawal of the child's position and/or the debt placed with a debt collecting service. Communication will be delivered via electronic and hard copy letter, and verbally via telephone.
- If a decision is made to withdraw the child's place at the service, the parents/guardians will be provided with 14 days' notice in writing, via electronic and hard copy correspondence.

8. Refund of fees

If a family becomes eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy during a term, a full refund of the applicable term fees (and fee deposit, where appropriate) will be provided. Fees may still apply for programs offering more than the required minimum hours per week.

In any other case, fees are non-refundable (exceptional circumstances may apply – these are at the discretion of the Committee of Management of Ashwood Children's Centre). There will be no refund of fees in the following circumstances:

- a child's short-term illness
- family holiday during operational times
- closure of the service due to extreme and unavoidable circumstances.

Fees for long day care/long day Kindergarten are not charged for the following situations:

- gazetted public holidays
- Centre closure across the Christmas/New Year period
- Centre closure for educator training day/s, clean-up day and set up day.

At the completion of a child's enrolment at the Centre, and in the event of a credit balance remaining on a parents' account, a refund will be issued at the end of January the year after a child's enrolment has ceased. Refunds will be issued either via cheque, or if bank details are provided to admin@ashwoodchildrenscentre.org via electronic transfer.

9. Support services

Families experiencing financial hardship often require access to family support services. Information on these services is available from the kindergarten service provider and a list can be supplied to those families who require it.

10. Notification of fee changes during the year

Fees set for the year would only be reviewed in extraordinary circumstances, for example, if attendance rates fall below the budget 'break even' point. Parents/guardians will be notified 28 days in advance of any required fee increase, with the reasoning for the fee increase outlined in the electronic/hard copy letter advising of the impending fee increase.

ATTACHMENT 2
Schedule of Fees and Charges
Ashwood Children's Centre
Fee schedule December 2017

Four Year Old Kindergarten

Kindergarten Fee:	\$550.00 per term
Kindergarten Deposit:	\$275.00 (payable on acceptance of position, and held as part-payment of term 1 fees)

(Deposit of \$5.00 required to secure sessional Kindergarten position for holders of eligible concession cards.)

Long Day Care/Long Day Kindergarten

Weekly Fee:	\$590.00 [7.00 am – 6.00 pm, Monday – Friday]
Daily Child Care Fee:	\$118.00 [7.00am – 6.00pm]
Half Day Child Care Fee:	\$98.00 [7.00 am – 12.30 pm OR 12.30 pm – 6.00 pm]

Fees applicable to all types of attendance within Ashwood Children's Centre

Waiting List Fee	\$10.00 per family
Enrolment Fee	\$35.00 per child
Initial Membership to ACC:	\$3.00
Ongoing Membership:	\$2.00 (covered by ACC Parents & Friends)
Voluntary Maintenance Levy:	\$50.00 per annum (refundable on written request)
Account in Arrears penalty:	\$5.00 per week in arrears
Late Collection of Child penalty:	\$5.00 per 5 minutes or part thereof