



State Government announces \$170M free kinder scheme for parents in 2021

Parents in Victoria will get access to free kinder and before- and after-school programs for their children from next year

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Victorian parents will gain access to free kinder for their children in 2021 as the State Government endeavours to encourage people back into the workforce in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Up to 400 government primary schools will also be offered funding to start before- and after-school care programs, if they don't already have them running.

Key scheme features

Premier Daniel Andrews said the \$169.6 million scheme will provide free kindergarten for three- and four-year-olds in funded programs, and reduced fees for three-year-olds in unfunded, sessional kinder.

Families will save up to \$2,000 for every child enrolled.

"We understand that many families are doing it tough," Mr Andrews said. "And if we can deal with some of the fixed costs of their participation in the workforce, the fixed costs of them going and earning to provide for their family, that can be a real boost to household budgets."

Kinder will be free for eligible three- and four-year-olds attending any participating sessional kindergarten program.

Who is eligible for the scheme?

The State Government will offer subsidies to early childhood services that provide funded kindergarten programs, meaning free kinder for four-year-olds in those programs.

Three-year-olds will be eligible if they are attending a participating sessional kinder.

Mr Andrews said funded kinder for three-year-olds was currently provided in about 21 local government areas in Victoria, with more to be rolled out next year.

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Read more about the State Government's funded three-year-old kinder roll-out here: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/three-year-old-kinder.aspx>.

For families with children attending unfunded programs for three-year-olds in sessional kindergartens, fees will be reduced.

Helping women back into the workforce

The Premier said the scheme was largely aimed at helping women return to work.

Recent research by Equity Economics shows that women have suffered a greater share of job losses during the pandemic, with many of the stimulus measures announced to date favouring men.

Mr Andrews said the free kinder program will partly address some of that imbalance.

"Whether it be home schooling or many of the other pressures in terms of the care, responsibilities not exclusively but all too often fall to mums to carry out," he said.



What's involved for before and after school care?

The scheme also provides \$81.6 million towards making before- and after-school care more available.

Grants of up to \$75,000 will be all for schools that don't currently offer before and after school care to start such programs.

"There are many schools which don't run before- and after-school care and we think that this is just a logical next step," Mr Andrews said.

The government's target is for 95 per cent of schools to be able to provide a before- and after-school care program.

Are there refunds for fees already paid?

Under the free kinder initiative, any fees that have been already paid for 2021 will be returned to families in full.

What if your child is five years old?

A child attending a funded kinder program who is aged five will be eligible for funding. The funding applies to anyone eligible for free kinder in either sessional or long daycare services.