

Title	Priority of Access Policy
<b>Description</b>	The policy provides a clear and transparent operational process for offering places in Council’s long day care programs and kindergartens to families that register their children through the Central Registration System (CRS).
<b>Category</b>	Operational Policy
<b>Approval authority</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>Responsible officer</b>	Manager, Families, Youth and Children
<b>Approval date</b>	July 2024
<b>Review cycle</b>	3 years
<b>Review date</b>	July 2027
<b>Document Reference (Trim)</b>	
<b>Human Rights compatibility</b>	This policy has been assessed and is compatible with the Victorian Charter of Human Rights of Responsibilities

## 1. Background

Access to early childhood education and care, such as kindergarten and long day care, has significant impacts of the long-term social outcomes of children. Participation in quality programs supports young children with the development of their social and emotional skills, physical development, language development and cognitive function.

Access to early childhood education also enables families to pursue employment and study that can support financial self-determination and positive outcomes for family circumstances. The provision of children’s service removes a barrier to participation, particularly for women, who have, and continue to, take on the greater portion of caring responsibilities.

Families and children in our community have a diversity of needs. Each family has a context where there are advantages and disadvantages that impact a child’s life journey. Research shows that access to quality education and care can support children and families by filling some of those gaps. The Commonwealth Government’s Closing the Gap plan highlights the national priority to address the inequity of social outcomes for First Peoples. Closing the Gap targets 3 & 4 focuses on the early years. This includes the target that at least 95% of 4-year-old First People’s children are engaged in high quality and culturally appropriate early childhood education by 2025.

### Yarra’s Community Profile

According to the Australian Development Census Data 2021, of the children beginning primary school:

- 18.3% of children were vulnerable in 2 of the 5 learning domains measured.
- 11.4% of children were vulnerable in 1 of the 5 learning domains measured.

Population data by ID analytics:

- 18.5% of Yarra households were classed as low-income households.
- 6% of Yarra households were single parent families.
- 31.5% of the Yarra population reported 1 or more health conditions.
- 3.9% of the Yarra population needing support for a disability
- 11.8% of the Yarra population had a mental health condition.
- 0.5% of the Yarra population identified as First Peoples.
- 9.5% of the Yarra population live in social housing.

## 2. Purpose

The Priority of Access Policy ensures that there are clear and transparent operational criterion and processes for the allocation of places into Council operated children's services and in Council buildings where children's services operate.

Council places a priority on addressing the needs of people in our community who are vulnerable and diverse. This policy is evidenced based and ensure prioritisation of access to education and care based on the circumstances and needs of each family. With long day care provision, priority of access to placement also relates to the need for parents and guardians to participate in the workforce.

The Priority of Access Policy reflects:

- The Commonwealth Government's Child Care Subsidy program, which aims to assist families who are most in need and supports the safety and wellbeing of children at risk.
- The Commonwealth's Closing the Gap Early Year's actions.
- The Victorian State Governments kindergarten funding requirements and Victorian Department of Education Koorie Kids Shine program.
- The insights from the Australian Early Childhood Development Census Data
- Council's ongoing commitment to residents of Yarra and equitable access to early years services.
- Council's Social Justice Charter guiding principles of access and equity.
- Council's Yana Ngargna Plan priority area of Community Health and Wellbeing.
- Council's 0-25 Framework –
  - Strategic Priority 1 The diversity and uniqueness of children, young people and their families is welcomed and celebrated.
  - Strategic Priority 4 Improve participation of children, young people and their families in learning, employment, education, and training.
  - Strategic Priority 5 Improve the health and wellbeing of children, young people, and their families.

## 3. Policy

The Priority of Access Policy is applicable to funded kindergarten programs, and permanent long day care enrolment. Kindergarten is prioritised in accordance with the State Government funding requirements. Long Day Care places are prioritised in line with the Commonwealth Government's aim to help families who are most in need to access care and support the safety and wellbeing of children at risk.

This policy applies to:

- Current and future Council managed centre-based education and care services.
- Centre-based education and care services operating from a City of Yarra building.

The policy does not apply to:

- Occasional care, Adult English Migrant Program (AMEP) sessions and casual care sessions in long day care are excluded from the application of the Priority of Access policy.

### 3.1 Long day care and Priority of Access

#### Priority delegations

Priority delegations are assigned where children or families have a priority indicator as defined below. These delegations are cumulative to ensure that places are offered equitably to those children and families most in need and/or identified as priority cohorts.

#### Priority Categories

The categories outlined below reflect the State and Commonwealth priority of access guidelines.

Priority 1: Children from a First Peoples background or a child at risk of serious abuse or neglect including:

- a. children in receipt of additional childcare subsidy.
- b. children in out of home care, kinship care or grandparent care
- c. children in situations of family violence or insecure housing
- d. children referred by:
  - i. Child Protection services
  - ii. Family support agencies
  - iii. Maternal Child Health Nurse or Enhanced Maternal Child Health Nurse

Priority 2: A child in need of priority care due to serious change of circumstances (e.g. death of an immediate family member, cancer treatment, loss of accommodation due to fire/natural disaster, court hearings)

Priority 3: A child of a sole parent who satisfies, or parents who both satisfy, the activity test through paid employment.

Priority 4: A child of a sole parent who satisfies, or parents who both satisfy, the activity test through training, volunteer, and/or training.

Priority 5: Any other child.

Families that meet priority 1 and priority 2 are encouraged to contact Council's Children's Services team, who can assist in navigating the central registration application process and assess any additional supports required.

Additionally, within each priority category outlined above and in line with State and Commonwealth priority of access guidelines, further priority will be given to the following children:

Tier 1:

- Children with additional needs, defined as children who:
  - require additional assistance to fully participate in the education and care program.
  - require a combination of services which are individually planned.
  - have an identified specific disability or developmental delay.

Tier 2:

- Families which include a person with enrolled in the National Disability Insurance Scheme or a has a disability diagnosis.
- Families which include a person who has a diagnosis of a chronic or serious health issue and for whom a medical practitioner has requested in writing for the enrolment of a child into childcare.

Tier 3:

- Children of single parents
- Families on low incomes as defined by the Child-Care Subsidy highest subsidy threshold or hold a health care card.
- Asylum seeker and refugee children
- Multiple birth children - triplets and above.

Additionally, the following priorities are included by Council to support participation by community members:

Tier 4:

- Children whose family resides in Yarra.
- Siblings of children enrolled in the same Yarra Children's Service

Tier 5:

- Children whose family work or study in Yarra
- Children currently engaged in a Council managed service requesting a transfer of centre.

### 3.2 Priority of Access for funded kindergarten places

Placement in a funded year of kindergarten must be allocated in line with the State Government Priority of Access Procedure. (refer [J641-Kindergarten-Funding-Guide-v6.pdf education.vic.gov.au](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/J641-Kindergarten-Funding-Guide-v6.pdf))

**Priority 1:**

- A child at risk of serious abuse or neglect including:
  - children in receipt of additional childcare subsidy.
  - children in out of home care, kinship care or grandparent care
  - children in situations of family violence or insecure housing.
  - children referred by:

- Child Protection services
- Family support agencies
- Maternal Child Health Nurse or Enhanced Maternal Child Health Nurse.
- Children from a First Peoples background
- Asylum seeker and refugee children.

## Priority 2:

- Children who are eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy
  - A child or parent holds a Commonwealth Health Care Card, Pensioner Concession Card, Veteran's Affairs Card, or
  - multiple birth triplets or quadruplets
- Children with additional needs, defined as children who:
  - require additional assistance to fully participate in the kindergarten program.
  - require a combination of services which are individually planned.
  - have an identified specific disability or developmental delay.

## Priority 3:

Having satisfied the requirements of State Priority of Access Guidelines, remaining places will be allocated based upon the following criteria:

- Siblings of children enrolled in the same Yarra Children's Service
- Children whose family resides in Yarra.
- Children whose family work or study in Yarra
- Children who have engaged in a Yarra pre-kindergarten program or long day care in the year before kindergarten.

### 3.3 Priority places during Best Start, Best Life Kindergarten Reform

Until 2036, as services roll-out to 15 hours of 3-year-old kindergarten and 30 hours of pre-prep (4-year-old kindergarten), priority of places will be given to:

1. Children accessing kindergarten in the year before school, i.e. 4-year-old kindergarten access over a child needing 3-year-old kindergarten.
2. Children in the priority cohorts as identified by Department of Education:
  - a. Accessing prep-prep from 2026 onwards:
    - i. children from a First Peoples background
    - ii. children from a refugee or asylum seeker background
    - iii. children who have had contact with Child Protection services.
  - b. Accessing prep-prep from 2028 onwards:
    - i. children who have (or have a parent or guardian who has) a Commonwealth concession card.
    - ii. children who are a multiple birth child (triplets or more).
3. Ensuring that in the event of supply deficits/constraints, the maximum number of children can access kindergarten. This may mean delaying the expansion of kindergarten hours in

favour of providing a higher number of places. i.e. 2 places at 15 hours rather than 1 place at 30 hours.

#### 4. Related Documents

- Child Care Provider Handbook
- DE Kindergarten funding guidelines.

Approval

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Sue Wilkinson  
Chief Executive Officer