

Fees Policy – Early Childhood Education and Care and Integrated Kinder

Policy Details

Classification	Mandatory
Quality area/s	7 – Governance and Leadership
Policy owner	President president@raleighst.org
Date of approval/most recent review	Nov 2024
Date of next review	June 2025



PURPOSE

This policy provides a clear set of guidelines for:

- the setting, payment and collection of fees for children enrolled in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) program and the integrated kinder program at Raleigh St Community Children's Centre services (Raleigh St)
- ensuring the viability of Raleigh St, by setting appropriate fees and charges
- the equitable and non-discriminatory application of fees across the programs provided by Raleigh St



POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

Raleigh St 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
- maintaining confidentiality in relation to the financial circumstances of families
- advising users of the service about program government funding and fees to be paid by families

SCOPE

This policy applies to the Committee of Management, persons with management or control, nominated supervisor, persons in day-to-day charge and families attending Raleigh St.

RESPONSIBILITIES	Committee of Management and persons with management or control	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge	Early childhood teacher, educators and all other staff	Families	Contractors, volunteers and students
R indicates legislation requirement, and should not be deleted					
Ensuring that policies and procedures are in place for the payment of fees and the provision of a statement of fees charged by the service (<i>Regulation 168</i>), and take reasonable steps to ensure those policies and procedures are followed (<i>Regulation 170</i>)	R	✓			
Reviewing the current budget to determine fee income requirements	R	✓			
Developing a fee policy that balances the parent's/guardian's capacity to pay, with providing a high-quality program and maintaining service viability	R	✓			
Communicating with families at enrolment about fees, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the amounts charged • payment periods and methods • how the Child Care Subsidy or other government subsidy will be applied • notice periods • how they can access copies of statements/receipts financial hardship considerations and payment plans	R	✓			
Implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with families, the nominated supervisor and staff, and in line with the requirements of the Commonwealth Government's Child Care Subsidy and Additional Child Care Subsidy (<i>refer to Sources</i>)	R	✓			
Reviewing the effectiveness of the procedures for late payment and support offered	R	✓			
Considering options for payment when affordability is an issue for families	R	✓			
Clearly communicating this policy and payment options to families in a culturally-sensitive way, and where possible in the family's first language	R	✓			
Ensuring that the <i>Fees Policy</i> is readily accessible at the service (<i>Regulation 171</i>)	R	✓			

Taking reasonable steps to ensure that nominated supervisors, ECT/educators, staff and volunteers follow this policy and procedure (<i>Regulation 170</i>)	R	✓	✓		✓
Providing all families with fee information (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>)	R	✓			
Providing all families with a statement of fees and charges upon enrolment of their child/ren	R	✓			
Providing all families with a Complying Written Arrangement (<i>refer to Definitions and Attachment 2</i>). All arrangements must be recorded, either on paper or electronically, and must be kept by the provider	R	✓			
Ensuring that once the approved provider enters into a Complying Written Arrangement (<i>refer to Definitions</i>) with a family, they must submit an enrolment notice within seven days of the end of the week in which the arrangement started	R	✓			
Informing families that children who haven't attended a session of care in 26 consecutive weeks will no longer be eligible for Child Care Subsidy (<i>refer to Definitions</i>)	R	✓			
Informing families if they are receiving Child Care Subsidy (<i>refer to Definitions</i>), they must update Centrelink on any changes to their income, activity and other circumstances via their Centrelink online account	R	✓			
Ensuring fees are collected and receipted	R	✓			
Collecting all relevant information and maintaining relevant documentation regarding those with entitlement to concessions, where applicable	R	✓		✓	
Complying with the service's <i>Privacy and Confidentiality Policy</i> regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of fees	R	✓			
Notifying families a minimum of 14 days before any proposed changes that will affect the fees charged or the way in which fees are collected. (<i>Regulation 172(2)</i>)	R	✓			
Addressing any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service in a timely manner	R	✓			
Reading the Raleigh St Fee information for families (<i>refer to Attachment 1</i>), and complying with the Complying Written Arrangement (<i>refer to Definitions and Attachment 2</i>)				✓	
Notifying the Committee of Management if they are experiencing difficulties with the payment of fees				✓	
Ensuring that children enrolled in a kindergarten program are not charged higher fees in comparison to children that are not attracting kindergarten funding	R	✓			

Directly offsetting the full Free Kinder entitlement from the fees of families with children receiving their funded integrated kindergarten program at the centre	R	✓			
Applying the fee offset regularly (e.g., fortnightly or monthly) and clearly indicating the offset amount (labelled Victorian Government Free Kinder offset) on parent/guardian's invoice statements	R	✓			
Communicating with families that the offsets will not impact their CCS payments	R	✓			
Use any surplus funding on improvement efforts for the funded kindergarten program, such as improving quality and supporting engagement of families for the minority of cases where parents are charged less than the Free Kinder entitlement in out-of-pocket fees for the duration of the kindergarten year	R	✓			



BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

BACKGROUND

Regulation 168(2) (n) of Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 requires that Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services have a comprehensive written fees policy, and the content of this policy must be communicated to families. The policy must include a written statement about the fees to be charged and the payment process. All families must be informed of applicable fees at the time of enrolment.

Australian families receive help with the cost of ECEC through the Child Care Subsidy (CCS). The Australian Government, through the Department of Education (DE) and Services Australia, administers the Child Care Subsidy (CCS). Providers must be approved by the department to receive CCS.

DE is responsible for the legislation that underpins CCS. This legislation is called Family Assistance Law (FAL). All providers that receive CCS must follow the rules under FAL. DE monitors providers' compliance with FAL.

The Australian Government subsidises the cost of ECEC. State and territory governments are responsible for the health, safety, wellbeing and educational outcomes of children.

The Australian Government considers that immunisation is an important health measure for children and their families, as it is the safest and most effective way of providing protection against harmful and often deadly diseases. To meet the Child Care Subsidy immunisation requirements, children must be immunised according to the standard vaccination schedule, be on an eligible catch-up vaccination schedule or have an approved exemption from being immunised.

CCS is paid directly to approved providers and passed on to families as a fee reduction.

Additional Child Care Subsidy provides additional fee assistance to support vulnerable or disadvantaged families and children. This support recognises the preventative and protective influence of quality ECEC on a child's health, wellbeing and development, and the importance of continuity of care.

There are four different payments under Additional Child Care Subsidy:

- Additional Child Care Subsidy (child wellbeing)—to help children who are at risk of serious abuse or neglect.

- Additional Child Care Subsidy (grandparent)—to help grandparents on income support who are the principal caregiver of their grandchildren.
- Additional Child Care Subsidy (temporary financial hardship)—to help families experiencing financial hardship.
- Additional Child Care Subsidy (transition to work)—to help low-income families transitioning from income support to work.

The Inclusion Support Program is designed to assist ECEC services to include children with inclusion needs by providing support, in the form of practical and tailored advice and strategies on effective inclusive practice, from contracted Inclusion Agencies as well as funding to address more challenging inclusion barriers.

The Community Child Care Fund is designed to help eligible ECEC providers address barriers to ECEC participation, particularly in disadvantaged communities, including Indigenous communities.

LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS

Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

- A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999
- A New Tax System (Family Assistance) (Administration) Act 1999
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 (Vic)
- Child Care Subsidy Minister's Rules 2017
- Child Care Subsidy Secretary's Rules 2017
- 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: Regulation 168(2)(n)
- Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic)
- Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Jobs for Families Child Care Package) Act 2017
- National Quality Standard, including Quality Area 7: Governance and Leadership

The most current amendments to listed legislation can be found at:

- Victorian Legislation – Victorian Law Today: www.legislation.vic.gov.au
- Commonwealth Legislation – Federal Register of Legislation: www.legislation.gov.au



DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For regularly used terms e.g. Approved provider, Nominated supervisor, Notifiable complaints, Serious incidents, Duty of care, etc. refer to the Definitions file of the PolicyWorks catalogue.

Centrelink: The agency that delivers payments and services to individuals and families on behalf of the Australian Government.

Child Care Safety Net: Targeted assistance to vulnerable and at-risk children and their families, as well as supporting child care services in disadvantaged communities to address barriers in accessing child care.

The Child Care Safety Net has three components:

- Additional Child Care Subsidy
- Community Child Care Fund
- Inclusion Support Program

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

Complying Written Arrangement: A written arrangement between a ECEC provider and an individual to provide ECEC in return for fees. The arrangement includes certain required information:

- the names and contact details of the provider and the individual(s)
- the date the arrangement starts
- the name and date of birth of the child (or children)
- if care will be provided on a routine basis and if so
 - details about the days on which sessions of care will usually occur
 - the usual start and end times for these sessions of care
 - whether care will be on a casual or flexible basis (in addition to, or instead of, a routine basis)
- details of fees charged under the arrangement (providers can reference a fee schedule or information available on their website), which the parties understand may vary from time to time.

Additional information can be included to support the individual's understanding of their payment obligations

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 do not incur this additional charge (*refer to Excursions and Service Events Policy*).

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

Late collection fee: A charge that may be imposed by the approved provider when families are late to collect their child/children from the program (*refer to Attachment 1*)

Security bond: A charge to secure a place that has been offered in a program at the service. This should not act as a barrier to enrolling for any families. Services must ensure that families understand that the security bond will only be refunded (minus fees incurred) if the child commences in the service.

SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES



SOURCES

- Department of Education: Child Care Subsidy (CCS): www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/child-care-subsidy
- The Child Care Provider Handbook: www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/resources/child-care-provider-handbook

RELATED POLICIES

- Compliments and Complaints
 - Delivery and Collection of Children
 - Enrolment and Orientation
 - Excursions and Service Events
 - Inclusion and Equity
 - Privacy and Confidentiality
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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
- notifying all stakeholders affected by this policy at least 14 days before making any significant changes to this policy or its procedures, unless a lesser period is necessary due to risk
(Regulation 172 (2))

ATTACHMENTS



- Attachment 1: Fee information for families
- Attachment 2: Fee Agreement



AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the Committee of Management of Raleigh St on 18/06/2024.

NEXT REVIEW DATE: 01/06/2024

Date	Modification
Nov 2024	Security bond reduced to 1 week's unsubsidised fees in response to cost of living pressures
June 2024	Policy updated to reflect new fee and align with ELAA Ver 1.1
June 2023	Policy updated to reflect new fee from 10 July 2023
February 2023	Policy reviewed and updated to align with ELAA Version 1.0
June 2022	Policy reviewed and updated to align with CC Desktop template
July 2017	Policy created and endorsed by CoM

ATTACHMENT 1. FEE INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

Raleigh St Community Children's Centre Services Fees for FY 2024-25

1. General information

Raleigh St abides by the *Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Jobs for Families Child Care Package) Act 2017 (refer to Legislation and standards)*. The Child Care Subsidy helps by assisting families with their child care fees and provides greater assistance to low and middle-income families. The Child Care Safety Net provides families and services extra support if they are vulnerable and disadvantaged or located in a regional or remote community.

Hours of operation	7:30am to 6:00pm Mon-Fri
Planned Closures	Public holidays, 21 st Dec 2024-13 th Jan 2025

2. How fees are set

As part of the budget development process, Raleigh St sets fees each financial year for the programs of the service, taking into consideration:

- the financial viability of the service
- the level of government funding provided
- the availability of other income sources, such as grants
- the fees charged by similar services in the area
- the capacity of families to pay fees
- reasonable expenditure in meeting agreed program quality and standards
- requirements of Child Care Subsidy: www.education.gov.au

Once fees are set for the financial year, they will only be reviewed in extraordinary circumstances, for example, if enrolments drop and the service is at risk of not being able to meet its expenses.

3. Other charges

Other charges levied by Raleigh St include:

- **Excursion/service event charge:** At times throughout the year an additional excursion(s) or event(s) may be arranged where it is considered relevant to the service's program and the children's interests. At this time any additional costs to families are taken into consideration before a decision is made (*refer to Excursions and Service Events Policy*).
- **Late collection fee:** The Committee of Management reserves the right to implement a late collection charge when families are late in collecting a child from the service. This charge will be set at a level determined by **the Committee of Management**.

4. Statement of fees and charges

A statement of fees and charges will be provided to families on enrolment (*refer to Attachment 2*).

5. Payment of fees

Raleigh St will regularly review payment options and procedures to ensure that they are inclusive and sensitive to families' cultural and financial situations.

Fees will be invoiced on a fortnightly basis. Invoices will show any Child Care Subsidy payments made by the Commonwealth Government and the remaining gap fee is to be paid by the family within 3 days of the date of the invoice. Families are expected to pay the gap fee shown on the invoice each fortnight and not allow fees to fall more than 2 weeks into arrears.

Families experiencing difficulty in paying fees are requested to contact the Director to arrange a suitable alternative payment plan. The *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* of the service will be always complied with in relation to a family's financial/personal circumstances.

Method of payment

- Fees are payable by direct debit only
- Raleigh St uses Xap, a Child Care Subsidy System used for tracking fees, subsidies and payments. Upon enrolment, families are issued with a username and password to set up their payment details and view their fees account in Xap
- Families are expected to become familiar with this application and keep track of their fees account via this portal at www.xap.rocks or through the Xap *Smile* app on a tablet or phone
- Invoices will be sent to the families' nominated email address on a fortnightly basis and payments are debited from the account by a direct debit arrangement between the family and a third party (QuickPay) on the due date of the invoice
- The direct debit occurs on the Friday following receipt of the last invoice, and families are invoiced for fees in arrears
- It is the family's responsibility to inform Raleigh St if invoices are not being received, or the nominated email address has changed
- An \$8.50 dishonour fee is charged by QuickPay if the direct debit fails due to insufficient funds.
- There are fees if you nominate a credit card facility to pay your account - 1.8% of the payment amount for Visa or Mastercard, and 3.6% for Amex or Diners Club cards
- Direct Debit from a savings account does not incur processing fees

6. Cancellation of booking

Families are asked to provide 4 weeks' notice of the cancellation of a booking or a reduction in permanent days booked for their child. Fees will continue to apply for the 4 weeks' notice period regardless of attendance unless cancellation of booking is due to an illness and a medical certificate is provided.

Note: Child Care Subsidy will not be paid by Services Australia on fees for days that are charged after the last physical day of attendance of a child.

7. Unpaid fees

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

- An initial reminder letter will be sent to families with a specified payment date and will include information on a range of support options available for the family.
- Where payment is still not received, families will be invited to attend a meeting to discuss the range of support options available and establish a payment plan.
- Failure to attend the meeting and continued non-payment may result in a second and final letter notifying families that the child's place at the service may be withdrawn unless payment is made or a payment plan is entered into within a specified period of time. This letter will also include information on a range of support options available for the family.
- Raleigh St will continue to offer support and will reserve the right to employ the services of a debt collector.
- If a decision is made to withdraw the child's place at the service, the families will be provided with 14 days' notice in writing.
- No further enrolments of children from the families will be accepted until all outstanding fees have been paid.

7. Refund of fees

Fees are non-refundable (exceptional circumstances may apply – these are at the discretion of the Committee of Management). There will be no refund of fees in the following circumstances:

- a child's short-term illness
- public holidays

- family holiday during operational times
- closure of the service due to extreme and unavoidable circumstances.

In addition, there will be no refund where a family chooses not to send their child to the program for the maximum number of hours for which they are enrolled.

8. Fundraising

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.

9. Support services

Families experiencing financial hardship often require access to family support services. Information on these services may be available from the Director or alternatively families may contact the local council.

10. Notification of fee changes during the year

Fees set for the financial year would only be reviewed in extraordinary circumstances, for example, if attendance rates fall below the budget 'break even' point. Families will be notified two weeks in advance of any required fee increase and will be offered the option to request a payment plan.

Fee Schedule for Financial Year 2024/25

Covering period 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025

Sessions: 10.5 hours per day

Daily Fee: \$155.00

Weekly Fee (attending 5 days) \$765.00

Late collection charge

The following late fees apply from 6pm:

- \$5 for any part of the first 5 minutes
- \$10 for 5-10 minutes
- \$15 for 10-15 minutes
- \$1 each minute after 6:15pm

The late fee is determined by the CoM and administered by the Director.

We request that children are collected by 5:45pm to allow time for staff to pack-up the centre prior to their shift finishing at 6pm.

Security bond

A security bond is collected upon the acceptance of a place in the sessional kinder program. This amount is set at one week of unsubsidised fees for each child attending. This amount will be adjusted from time to time to ensure that the amount reflects the current fees and number of days of attendance of each child. All families must pay this bond before their child(ren) begin enrolment, and this amount is refundable upon the end of the child's enrolment, minus any outstanding fees incurred. This amount is not refundable if the family decides not to go ahead with the child's enrolment before the first day of attendance.

ATTACHMENT 2. FEE PAYMENT AGREEMENT

Please complete this form and return to Raleigh St Community Children's Centre

Fee payment contract

Child/ren full name: _____

Parent's/guardian's full name: _____

- I/We agree to pay the security bond as outlined in the Raleigh St Fees policies
- I/we acknowledge that the Early Childhood Education and Care service is funded by fees paid by families. The service cannot operate without the fees paid by families.
- I/we agree to pay 1 weeks' unsubsidised fees in advance prior to commencing at Raleigh St and remain up to date with payments of invoices whilst my child attends at Raleigh St
- I/we acknowledge having received and read the attached Raleigh St Fees policy, which sets out the procedure for fee payment
- I/we understand that fees are non-refundable.
- I/we agree that if our activity and financial circumstances change, we will immediately notify Centrelink to ensure our Child Care Subsidy entitlements are up to date
- I/we acknowledge that if fees are not paid by the due date, Raleigh St will implement the late payment of fees procedures, as outlined in the Fee Information for Families, which could result in the withdrawal of my/our child's place at the service and no further enrolments until the outstanding fees are paid.
- I/we agree that if my/our financial circumstances change and I/we am/are unable to pay as agreed, I/we will immediately notify the Centre Director to discuss alternative payment options.
- I/we agree to pay fees while the child is absent. Examples include annual leave, public holidays, illness, closure due to unforeseen circumstances etc.
- I/we acknowledge a late payment fee of \$8.80 will be charged to families for late payment of their account.
- I/we agree to collect my child/ren from Raleigh St 15 minutes prior to closing time to allow for handover with staff
- I/we agree to pay the late collection charge as outlined in the Fee Schedule if I pick my child/ren up after 6pm
- I/we agree to give 4 weeks' written notice of when my child/children will be leaving Raleigh St.

Signature (parent/guardian): _____ Date: _____

Note: invoices, receipts and collection of fees will be in accordance with the Raleigh St Fees policies