

Kindergarten Fee Collection Policy

Policy statement

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- the collection of 3-year-old and 4-year-old kindergarten fees
- an equitable and efficient fee payment process for ECMS kindergarten programs
- the collection of outstanding fees
- supporting families experiencing hardship

Policy principles

ECMS is a not-for-profit community enterprise committed to supporting all families to access quality early childhood education and care. Operating within our values of inclusion and respect ECMS aims to ensure our services are affordable, offer quality and value for money and remain sustainable for future children and families.

This policy applies to

All ECMS employees

CEO	<p>Is accountable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively promote and implement this policy at all times. • Authorise submission of an application to VCAT as per the policy key decision points.
Director, Finance and Business Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approves list of families to be referred to debt collection agency. • Coordinates VCAT submissions. • Authorise waiver of kindergarten fees due to financial hardship. • Ensure that the Fee Collection Process is followed and updated as necessary
Business Services Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the Fee Collection Process is followed and updated as necessary • Set dates annually for invoice distribution. • Ensure all letters and invoice templates are updated as required.

Accounts Receivable Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that the Fee Collection Process, as outlined in this policy, is followed. Keep accurate records and track the progress of unpaid invoices. Collates list of families with unpaid fees that might be referred to debt collection agency for consideration by Finance Manager. Sends approved list to debt collection agency. Informs General Manager, Finance of potential families requiring waiver of fees.
Centre Director, Nominated Supervisors and Area Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify families that may require assistance for fee payment. Identify families that may be eligible for a fee subsidy and notify the Fees Officer. Explore avenues for fee assistance for families as per the policy. Liaise with Finance to monitor and maintain debtors in line with this policy and procedure Escalate matters in line with this policy and procedure and the FSB 1.1 Financial Hardship and Fee Waiver Protocols

Background/context

To enable families to access Kindergarten Programs with as little to no cost (according to their circumstances) the Department of Education (DET) financially contributes through:

- Per Capita Funding,
- Kindergarten Fee Subsidies,
- Ratio Supplement Funding,
- Pre-Purchased places, and
- Early Start Kinder Placements.

Funding criteria is outlined in the *Victorian Kindergarten Policy, Procedures and Funding Criteria 2016*.

Billing

When enrolment within an ECMS service is confirmed each family will be provided with a Welcome Pack that contains the following information in relation to fees a letter detailing:

- term fees for that service,
- dates invoices will be issued,
- dates each payment is due,
- fee subsidy information,
- Rebate information,
- Payment plans and options, and
- Contact details.

Invoices will be sent to families each term as per the billing schedule determined in advance each year by the CFO.

All families will be expected to pay the full fee amount for kindergarten fees for 3-year-old kindergarten and 4-year-old kindergarten by the due date, 3 weeks after the invoice date.

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The acceptable payment methods are:

- BPay,
- Cheque,
- Money order, or
- credit card (excluding AMEX).

Families can pay by credit card online at <https://www.ecms.org.au/kindergarten-fee-payment/> or by phone by calling the Accounts Receivable Officer on 8481 1110. ECMS does not accept cash payment.

Families with a child not yet 3-years-old, who wish to hold a place until the child's birthday, are required to pay the full term fee.

Families with twins will receive a discount of \$15 per child per term. 4-year-old children within Wyndham City Council receive a 50% discount on the second sibling.

Fee Subsidy Entitlement

Families who are recipients of any of the following concession cards are eligible for free or low cost 4-year-old kindergarten programs:

- Health Care Card,
- A triplet or quadruplet attending in the same year,
- Pensioner Concession Card,
- Veterans' Affairs Gold or White card,
- a Temporary Protection/Humanitarian Visa (447, 451& 785) or a Resolution of Status (RoS), Class CD, Subclass 851,
- a Refugee/Special Humanitarian Visa (200-217),
- an Asylum Seeker Bridging Visa (A-F), or
- their child identifies as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

Families need to provide ECMS with the following details to ensure their discount or fee waiver is applied:

- the Name of the recipient,
- the Number of the card, and
- the Expiry date of the card.

Families need to notify the ECMS Fees Department if:

- any of the above cards are cancelled,
- the family's Health Care Card expiry date is extended, or
- they receive a card part way through the kindergarten year. A refund of fees applies for the period the card relates to.

The DET funding system, Kindergarten Information Management (KIM) closes at the end October of each year. It is imperative that families notify the ECMS Fees Department prior to this time of their Fee Subsidy eligibility. This will ensure ECMS can claim the subsidy and that is applied to the account.

Where applicable, ECMS Accounts Receivable Officer can apply for back dated funding from DET.

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Financial hardship

At any stage of the fee collection process, it may be identified by ECMS staff, or Central Enrolments, that a family is experiencing difficult circumstances that are limiting their capacity to pay kindergarten fees. The Accounts Receivable Officer will be informed immediately of these circumstances. These circumstances may include:

- a. Separation/divorce of parents
- b. Death of immediate family member
- c. Serious injury or illness
- d. Loss of employment, failed business or bankruptcy
- e. Damage to family home in the event of fire, flood etc.
- f. Imprisonment
- g. Any event triggering unexpected costs associated with homelessness, relocation or decreased support from family and friends.

There are a number of options available that ensures these families are able to continue to access kindergarten for their child. Families with outstanding debt and experiencing financial hardship will be contacted and have the following options considered and explored prior to the matter being referred to a debt collection agency. These options include:

1. If the family is not eligible for the Kindergarten Fees Subsidy, they may be offered a **payment plan** (see below). Families need to speak with the ECMS Accounts Receivable Officer to work out the details of their payment plan.

2. **Early Childhood Education Foundation**

Educators have the option of applying for fees assistance for families experiencing extreme financial hardship through the Early Childhood Education Foundation. For information and application forms: https://ela.org.au/about_us/early_childhood_education_foundation

3. **ECMS Fee Waiver**

ECMS may elect to waive or reduce kindergarten fees under some situations of financial hardship (see below).

Payment Plans

Families experiencing difficulty with payment of their kindergarten fees may agree to a payment plan by contacting the Fees Department via telephone 03 8481 1110. The payment plan should be designed to ensure the fees due for each kindergarten term are paid in full by the end of the kindergarten year for which the fees are applicable.

Payment Plans must be negotiated and agreed to on the basis that all kindergarten fees will be paid in accordance with the agreed plan.

The Accounts Receivable Officer will detail the payment plan within the fees and enrolment database and needs to document the plan in written correspondence to the family

ECMS Fee Waiver

If a family is identified by an ECMS Nominated Supervisors/Educators, Accounts Receivable Officer, or Central Enrolments as experiencing circumstances affecting their ability to pay (Financial Hardship) at any point during the fees collection process, ECMS can elect to waive or reduce the Kindergarten fees.

The Accounts Receivable officer will need to provide detailed accounts of the family's interactions and circumstances to the Area Manager which will be then be provided to the CFO

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for final approval prior to the Accounts Receivable Officer waiving the fees and updating the database.

While the waiver can extend for 1 term or the whole school year a timeframe for review will need to be identified within the fees database.

Support Services

Families experiencing financial hardship often require access to a family support service. Information on these services is available from Early Childhood Management Services and a list can be supplied to families who require it. Local Council can also provide relevant information.

Overdue Accounts

a) Three weeks overdue

If payment is not received, or contact not made by the family, within three weeks of the due date of the invoice, the family will receive a letter (LETTER 1) informing them the fees remain in arrears. They will be asked to either make immediate payment of the account or contact the ECMS Accounts Receivable Officer to discuss options.

b) Next invoice

If payment is still not made before the next term's invoices are to be sent, the family will receive a further reminder (LETTER 2) signed by the CFO with the next invoice requesting immediate payment. A phone call will also be made by the Accounts Receivable Officer to the family to discuss payment options.

c) Final Reminder

Families with outstanding money will receive a final reminder (LETTER 3) in November signed by the CFO requesting immediate payment of the outstanding monies, follow up phone calls will be made the Accounts Receivable Officer to discuss payment options.

d) Final Notice

If payment has not been received by 1 December of the school year, a Final Notice (LETTER 4) will be sent to the family advising any outstanding amounts at the conclusion of term 4, excluding amounts with agreed payment arrangements in place, will be referred to a debt collection agency unless payment is made by the end of the school year.

e) End of Year

If the fees remain unpaid at the conclusion of the school year and no suitable payment arrangement is in place, the family details will be passed on to a debt collection agency. The Chief Financial Officer is to approve the referral for debt collection.

f) Unsuccessful debt collection

If the debt collection process is unsuccessful and fees remain uncollected, the Chief Financial Officer will determine if the matter is appropriate for referral to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) for resolution. If the child is still enrolled in an ECMS kindergarten program, the child will not be excluded from attending during this process.

Decisions to refer any matter to VCAT must be referred to the CEO for approval.

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Professional Development and Public Holidays Closures

ECMS believes that ongoing professional development and training is vital for our staff to remain at the forefront of their profession and continue to provide quality early childhood education and care. Each year all staff will attend the annual conference and two other professional development days. On these days all of our kindergartens are closed. Families will need to arrange alternative care for their children on these day and will be notified of the dates in advance.

Fees are calculated on a term basis which allows for public holidays and any predetermined centre closures.

Family Holidays and Non-attendance days

When a child does not attend the kindergarten for reasons such as illness or holidays, families will continue to be charged for the term according to the child's regular attendance at the kindergarten.

Families who take extended holiday periods during term will still need to pay the full kindergarten term fee.

Cancellation of enrolment

Families are asked to provide the child's Educator with written notice of the cancellation of their child's enrolment in the kindergarten. The Educator must ensure that the Fees Department received this letter as soon as possible. Fees will continue to apply in full until cancellation of their child's enrolment is received.

For terms 1-3 fees will be pro-rated based on the proportion of the total number of term weeks of attendance at the kindergarten.

The full fee is payable for Term 4, even if the cancellation is received during Term 4.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Kindergarten Fees Collection Process map - key decision points and responsibilities

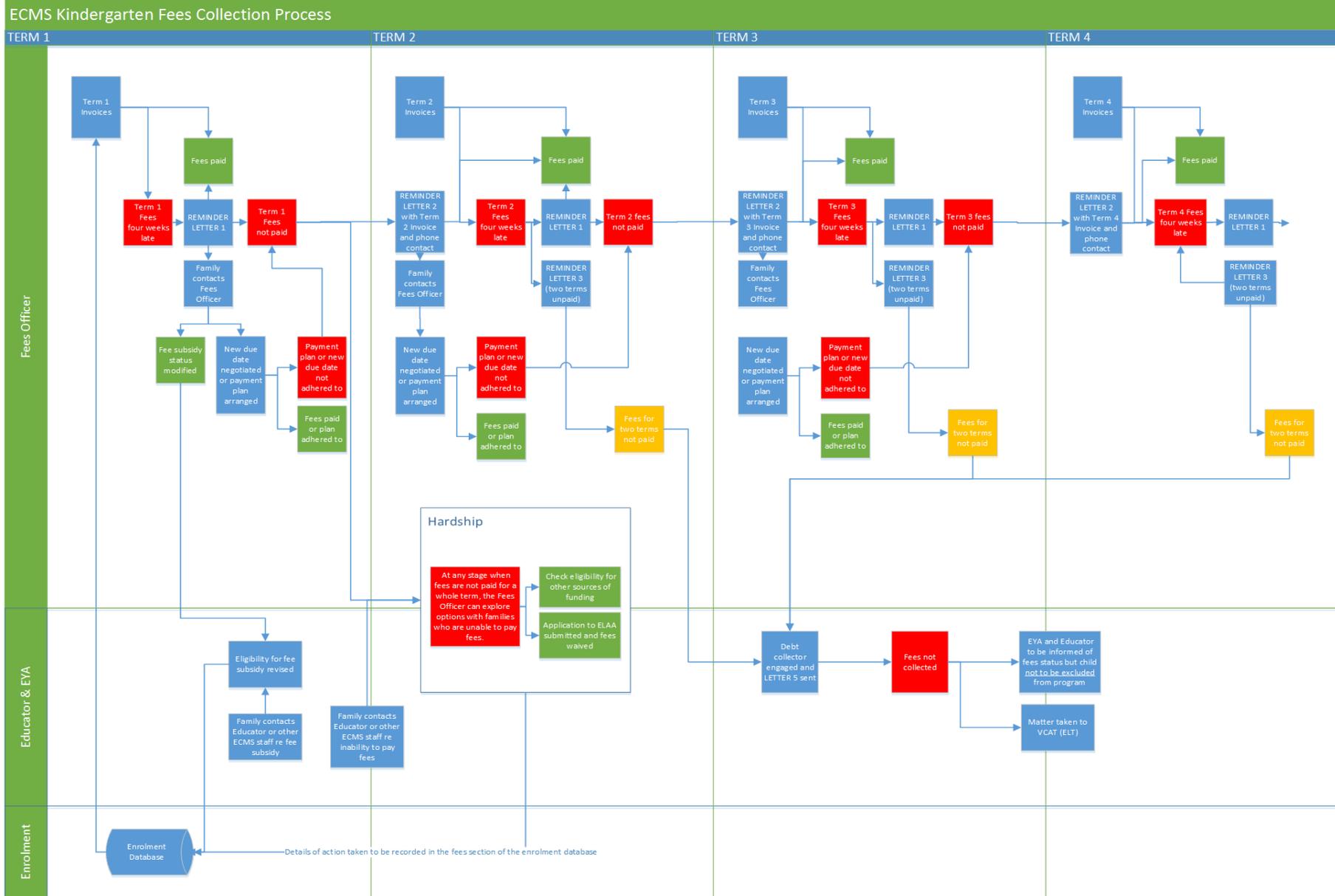
Appendix 2. Instructions for applying for **Early Childhood Education Foundation** assistance.

Appendix 3. Reminder letters to families

Policy Review Date	November 2016
Sources and Further Reading	The National Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 Reg 73-76, Education and Care Services National Law 2010 Section 168 & 323 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) Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic)
Related to NQS Q.A	7

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Appendix 1.1: Fees Collection Process map - key decision points and responsibilities



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Appendix 2. Applying for Early Childhood Education Foundation assistance

Selection Criteria

To be considered for assistance, the following criteria must be satisfied:

1. Child attending four-year-old preschool.
2. Demonstrated family commitment to maximise the opportunity and use of the allocated place.
3. Demonstrable extreme financial hardship within the family.
4. The child would be at risk if not attending the service - this could include physical, emotional, cognitive or social risks.
5. The family structure must be shown to be unable to provide the child with an early childhood experience, unless funds are made available.

The application must be submitted by the child's preschool service provider. This might be the Educator and their EYA.

Assistance is NOT available for outstanding debts. Therefore anticipated problems with fee payment need to be identified as early as possible each term.

Application forms available at
https://elaa.org.au/about_us/early_childhood_education_foundation

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Appendix 3. Reminder Letters

3a Letter 1: To be sent when fees are not paid three weeks after the due date.

3b Letter 2: To be sent with the next term's invoice when fees remain outstanding.

3c Letter 3: To be sent when fees are not paid three weeks after the following term's due date i.e. a term and a half late.

3d Letter 4: To be sent when fees remain unpaid for 2 terms. Final deadline for payment given and indicating that a debt collector will be engaged.

3e Fee Payment information page, to be included on the back of all invoices or reminder letters.

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Date
ID No.

Ms First Surname
Address
SUBURB 3333

Kindergarten Fees Reminder

Dear Ms Surname,

Our records indicate that we have not received your payment of \$xxx.xx which was due on X X 20XX.

This payment is for Junior Surname who attends XXX Kindergarten. We hope this was just an oversight on your part and you will be able to remit the funds due immediately.

If your records show that you have already made this payment, could you please contact the ECMS fees department on 03 8481 1110 so that the discrepancy can be resolved and any errors corrected on your account. Please let us know if you have any questions concerning the payment.

If you are experiencing financial difficulties, please do not hesitate to contact us so that we can find a way to assist you.

Yours sincerely,

ECMS Fees Office

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Date
ID No.

Ms First Surname
Address
SUBURB 3333

Kindergarten Fees Reminder and Term X Invoice

Dear Ms Surname,

Our records indicate that you have fees outstanding of \$xxx.xx for 20XX. The fees for Term X are now also due.

These payments are for Junior Surname who attends XXX Kindergarten. We hope this was just an oversight on your part and you will be able to remit the funds due immediately.

If your records show that you have already made the overdue payment, could you please contact the ECMS fees department on 03 8481 1110 so that the discrepancy can be resolved and any errors corrected on your account.

If you are experiencing financial difficulties, please do not hesitate to contact us so that we can find a way to assist you.

As a not-for-profit organisation, we aim to operate in a manner that provides accessible and affordable services whilst also allowing us to operate sustainably. Our fee income is vital to our ability to provide and maintain quality early childhood services. It is our policy that if fees remain unpaid with no explanation for two terms, the matter will be referred to a debt collection agency. If fees continue not to be paid, ECMS may decide to take legal action.

Please let us know if you have any questions concerning the payment.

Yours sincerely,

Chief Financial Officer

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Appendix 3c LETTER 3

Date
ID No.

Ms First Surname
Address
SUBURB 3333

Kindergarten Fees - Final Reminder

Dear Ms Surname,

Our records indicate that you have fees outstanding of \$xxx.xx for 20XX. These payments are for Junior Surname who attends XXX Kindergarten. We hope this was just an oversight on your part and you will be able to remit the funds due immediately.

ECMS is now requesting full payment of your outstanding fees by **Friday XX XXXXX 201X**. In the event of the amount remaining outstanding, ECMS will hand this matter to our debt collectors to pursue.

If your records show that you have already made the overdue payment, could you please contact the ECMS fees department on 03 8481 1110 so that the discrepancy can be resolved and any errors corrected on your account.

If you are experiencing financial difficulties, please do not hesitate to contact us so that we can find a way to assist you.

As a not-for-profit organisation, we aim to operate in a manner that provides accessible and affordable services whilst also allowing us to operate sustainably. Our fee income is vital to our ability to provide and maintain quality early childhood services. It is our policy that if fees remain unpaid with no explanation for two terms, the matter will be referred to a debt collection agency. If fees continue not to be paid, ECMS may decide to take legal action.

Please let us know if you have any questions concerning the payment.

Yours sincerely,

Chief Financial Officer

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Appendix 3d LETTER 4

Ms First Surname
Address
SUBURB 3333

Kindergarten Fees - Final Notice

Dear Ms Surname,

Our records indicate that you have fees outstanding of \$xxx.xx for 20xx. These payments are for xxxx xxxx who attends XXX Kindergarten.

The ECMS Accounts Receivable has made several attempts to contact you regarding your outstanding fees. Today, XXXXXXXXX, the ECMS Accounts Receivable established contact with you and has verbally explained the outstanding fees have to be paid.

ECMS is now requesting full payment of your outstanding fees by **Friday XX XXXXX 201X**. In the event of the amount remaining outstanding, ECMS will hand this matter to our debt collectors to pursue.

If you have made payments to this account, we require full details of payment, this must include; date of payment, amount paid and payment type.

As a not-for-profit organisation, we aim to operate in a manner that provides accessible and affordable services whilst also allowing us to operate sustainably. Our fee income is vital to our ability to provide and maintain quality early childhood services. It is our policy that if fees remain unpaid with no explanation, explanation for two terms the matter will be referred to a debt collection agency. If fees continue not to be paid, ECMS may decide to take legal action.

Please let us know if you have any questions concerning the payment.

Yours sincerely,

Chief Financial Officer

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Appendix 3e FEE PAYMENT INFORMATION

FEE ENQUIRIES

Phone: 1300 323 337 (Cost of local call)

Fax: 9445 0346

Email: fees@ecms.org.au

Website: www.ecms.org.au

Post: PO Box 182 Northcote Vic 3070

PAYMENT OPTIONS



Bill Code: 91033

Customer Reference Number: See your ID No. on the front of invoice

Contact your bank, credit union or building society for more information.

Credit Card

Pay by credit card online at www.ecms.org.au/kindergarten-fee-payment. Complete your VISA or MasterCard details on the remittance advice and forward to ECMS by mail, fax or email. Card payments are accepted over the telephone.

Cheque or Money Order

Made out to "Early Childhood Management Services (ECMS)". Please attach your remittance advice or write your details on the back along with your account number.

We do not accept AMEX.

FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

If you are experiencing financial hardship and are unable to pay your fees, please contact our Accounts Receivable Officer on 1300 323 337 to discuss a suitable payment plan. Alternatively, you may prefer to discuss this directly with your Educator at the Service. We will work collaboratively with you to develop a payment plan that will allow your child to continue to access education and care.

CANCELLATIONS

Please advise ECMS in writing if you intend to withdraw your child from kindergarten. Fees will be charged at pro-rata for cancellations between Terms 1 and 3. Cancellations received after Term 4 has started will be charged the full term fee.

FEE SUBSIDY

Four-Year-Old Kindergarten

The Victorian Government currently provides a fee subsidy to eligible families/guardians up to a 15-hour weekly program. To be eligible, you must hold a valid Health Care Card, Pensioner Card, DVA Gold Card/White Card or Visas 200-217, 447, 451, 786 or 785. You must complete the Centrelink Confirmation eServices (CCeS) consent form and provide a photocopy of your card. *The parent/guardian must inform ECMS about changes to their eligibility circumstances.* Consent forms are available from your kindergarten or downloaded from: www.ecms.org.au Forms must be returned to the kindergarten teacher.

IMPORTANT: ECMS need to be advised of your eligibility by 31st October

Early Start Kindergarten

Funding is available for up to 15 hours for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and 3-year-old children known to Child Protection or referred from Child Protection to Child First.

REGISTERED CARE

Receipts are available to be mailed out to families at the end of each term. Request a copy from the Fees Officer.

If you have questions relating to Registered Care please contact the Family Assistance Office on 13 6150 or visit their website www.humanservices.gov.au.

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