

Best Start, Best Life: Pre-Prep Roll-out Schedule

Frequently asked questions to support the early childhood education sector

Introduction

Background

The Victorian Government's announcement of an additional \$9 billion over 10 years is the most significant change to Victoria's early childhood sector in a generation. The Best Start, Best Life reform includes:

- Free Kinder programs for all three- and four-year-old children at participating services from the start of 2023
- Four-Year-Old Kindergarten transitioning to 'Pre-Prep' over the next decade, becoming a universal, 30-hour-a-week program of play-based learning available to every four-year-old child in Victoria
- establishing 50 new government-owned and affordable early learning centres. These centres will be built in locations across Victoria that have the greatest need and will make it easier for families to access education and care.

This record commitment is part of the ongoing reform to the early years in Victoria to support every child to get the best start for the best life.

These initiatives build on the existing Three-Year-Old Kindergarten reform, which will continue as planned, with no change to its roll-out schedule.

The introduction of flexible hours in 2023 is the next stage of the Three-Year-Old Kindergarten roll-out, with many services increasing their program hours to 15, while others scale up more gradually.

FAQs

What is Pre-Prep?

Four-Year-Old Kindergarten will transition to Pre-Prep over the next decade, becoming a universal, 30-hour-a-week program of play-based learning available to every four-year-old child in Victoria.

Play-based programs delivered by early childhood teachers and educators improve children's learning and development outcomes, particularly for vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Providing 30 hours of Pre-Prep will give children more access to these benefits, as well as supporting parents, especially women, to return to work.

Pre-Prep will be delivered through the existing early childhood sector, including all setting types such as standalone kindergarten services and long day care centres.

What is the Pre-Prep roll-out schedule?

Pre-Prep will be rolled out in a staged geographical approach, combined with giving priority to vulnerable and disadvantaged children, and Aboriginal children, for earlier access state-wide.

From 2025, Pre-Prep will commence in Ararat Rural City, Gannawarra Shire, Hindmarsh Shire, Murrindindi Shire, Northern Grampians Shire, and Yarriambiack Shire.

More Local Government Areas (LGAs) will roll out each year with families in metropolitan Melbourne able to access Pre-Prep from 2030.

This staged roll out is similar to the successful approach taken for Three-Year-Old Kindergarten and allows sufficient time to grow the workforce and infrastructure required to support this major uplift in service delivery.

To support children that will benefit most from 30 hours of teacher-led, play-based learning, vulnerable children across the state will be eligible for Pre-Prep from 2026, as well as Aboriginal children. Disadvantaged children will also be eligible from 2028.

From 2032, all Victorian children will have access to 30 hours of Pre-Prep across the state.

For further details on the roll-out schedule by LGAs, see [Attachments A](#) and [B](#).

Why is Pre-Prep being rolled out in regional areas first?

Pre-Prep can be rolled out more quickly in rural and regional areas because they tend to have more available infrastructure capacity.

These locations are also areas where children can sometimes have less access to educational opportunities.

The rural areas selected for early roll out also have higher levels of disadvantage and vulnerability, and targeting these areas first means that children who will benefit the most from increased access to early learning programs will be among the first to benefit from Pre-Prep.

How is the roll-out approach providing early access to Pre-Prep for vulnerable, disadvantaged, and Aboriginal children state-wide?

The children who will benefit the most from increased access to early learning programs will be among the first to benefit from Pre-Prep.

Children from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds outside of early roll-out areas will be prioritised earlier across Victoria to access between 15 to 30 hours of Pre-Prep earlier, along with Aboriginal children.

Statewide eligibility from 2026 includes children who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, as well as vulnerable children who are from a refugee or asylum seeker background or where the family has had contact with Child Protection services.

Disadvantaged children who have (or have a parent or guardian who has) a Commonwealth concession card and those who are a multiple birth child (triplets or more) will also become eligible from 2028.

Why will it take a decade for the reform to be rolled out state-wide?

The Victorian Government's announcement of this reform to be implemented over 10 years is the most significant change to Victoria's early childhood sector in a generation.

The decade-long timeline of the Best Start, Best Life reform is intentional as it allows time for the sector to grow the required workforce, necessary infrastructure and consult meaningfully at every stage of the roll-out.

How will services and providers find the staff to deliver the expanded reform?

Having enough teachers and educators to continue to deliver high-quality kindergarten and Pre-Prep programs is critical to the success of the Best Start Best Life reform, and the government is aware of the scale of this challenge.

To deliver Victoria's ambitious Three-Year-Old Kindergarten and Pre-Prep reforms, around 11,000 additional early childhood teachers and educators are required.

It is also essential that Victoria's current early childhood teachers and educators know that they are valued and supported in their roles.

The Victorian Government will invest an extra \$160 million in the kindergarten and Pre-Prep workforce over the next four years.

Alongside the existing investment of \$210 million detailed in the Kindergarten Workforce Strategy, this funding boost brings the total investment in Victoria's critical early childhood professionals to \$370 million. This means Victoria is leading the nation in its efforts to support this critical workforce.

This additional investment will fund a mix of existing and new initiatives, increase the number of high-quality early childhood teachers and educators in the sector and support Victorian children to get the best start in life.

More early childhood scholarships of between \$12,000 and \$34,000 will be available over the next four years, on top of the almost 1,000 scholarships already available to grow the early childhood teacher workforce. More than 3,000 scholarships to study early childhood teaching have already been awarded since October 2018.

Extra employment incentives of between \$9,000 and \$50,000 will be available for teachers and educators moving to, or re-joining, the Victorian sector and for priority services, such as those in

hard to staff locations. Qualified teachers returning to the sector, including retirees, can be eligible for these incentives and additional professional supports.

Existing recruitment supports such as the dedicated Early Childhood Jobs site and funded recruitment agency assistance for priority services will continue to be provided as part of this Victorian Government investment, along with Free TAFE for early childhood educators.

Will services and providers have enough space to deliver 30-hour Pre-Prep programs?

The Best Start, Best Life reform also includes a significant infrastructure investment in addition to the \$1.68 billion already committed to support the roll-out of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten. The Victorian Government has committed \$705 million to build and expand around 180 kindergartens on government school sites and \$250 million to build and upgrade around 60 kindergartens at Catholic and independent schools.

The Department of Education will work closely with local governments, providers, schools and other stakeholders to deliver new and expanded facilities where and when they are needed to support the reform. This will build on the collaborative approach taken in the roll-out of the Three-Year-Old Kindergarten reform.

The Best Start, Best Life reform will first arrive in areas where there is more existing physical capacity to meet the needs of local families. These locations are also areas where children can sometimes have less access to educational opportunities.

To support the roll-out of Pre-Prep, the Government will significantly expand its successful Kindergartens on School Sites program. Co-locating kindergartens and schools helps families avoid the double drop-off and supports children to transition successfully to school.

What is the evidence to support 30 hours of play-based learning for four-year-old children?

Australian and international evidence shows that quality play-based learning helps lay the foundation for success throughout a child's education and life.

Increasing program hours to 30 hours of play-based learning per week for 40 weeks in the year before school will give children even greater access to the many benefits that come with quality early childhood education

Studies have shown that high quality, developmentally appropriate 30-hour early learning programs can lead to improved learning and social outcomes.

Two years of quality early childhood education is shown to have more impact than one year and can lift children's outcomes across all learning domains, especially for disadvantaged and vulnerable children.

Providing access to more high-quality early learning also supports parents, especially women, to re-join the workforce.

Which services will be able to offer Pre-Prep?

Pre-Prep will be delivered through the existing early childhood sector, including sessional kindergartens and long-day-care centres.

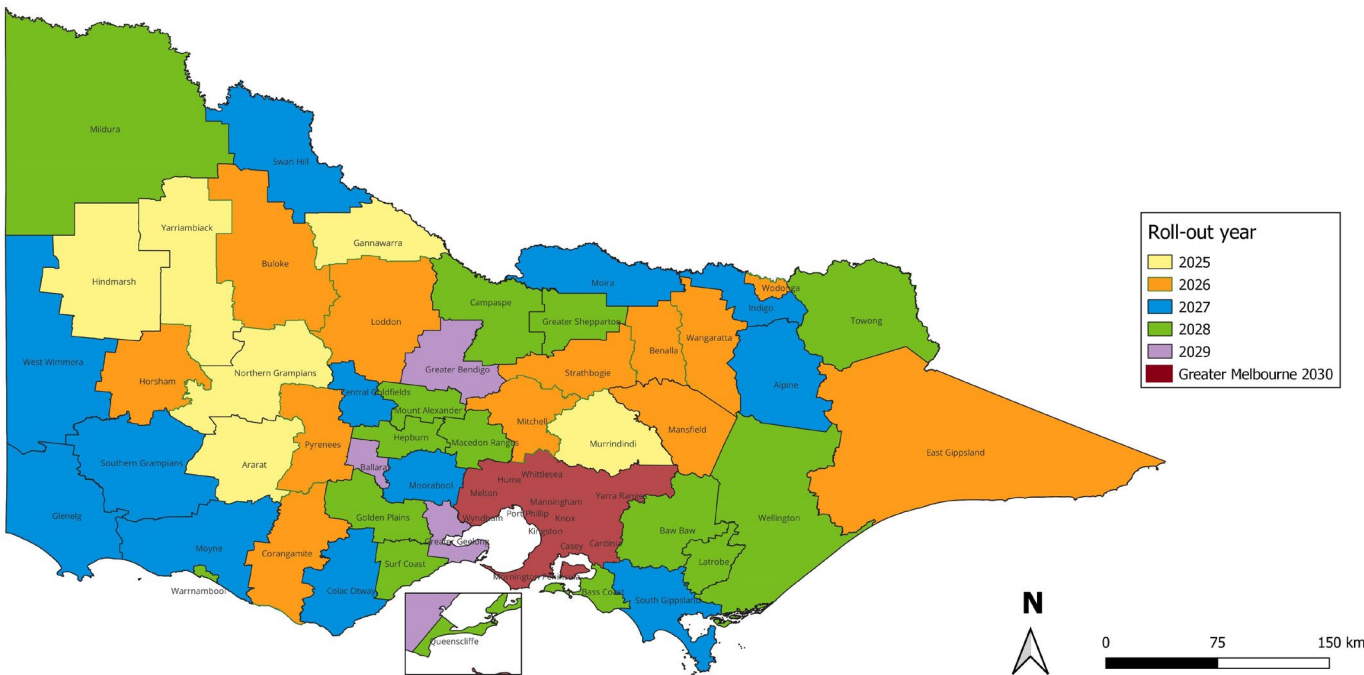
How many hours of funded Pre-Prep can services deliver?

Similar to Three-Year-Old Kindergarten, the roll-out of Pre-Prep will be done in stages.

As Pre-Prep gradually rolls out from 2025, services in roll-out areas may offer between

16--30 hours per week of high quality, play-based learning in the year before school, funded pro-rata. To support children who will benefit most from 30 hours of teacher-led, play-based learning, vulnerable children across the state will be eligible for 16-30 hours per week of Pre-Prep from 2026, as well as Aboriginal children. Disadvantaged children will also be eligible for 16-30 hours per week from 2028. By 2032, children across the state will be able to access 30 hours per week of Pre-Prep.

Attachment A: LGAs in scope by year (map)



2025	2025-2029 rural and regional LGAs outlined on the map above, starting at between 16-30 hours per week	plus	
2026			2026: State-wide roll-out to vulnerable children and Aboriginal children, starting at between 16-30 hours per week
2027			
2028			2028: State-wide roll-out to disadvantaged children, starting at between 16-30 hours per week
2029			
2030	Metropolitan Melbourne, starting at 16-20 hours per week		
2032	State-wide delivery of 30 hours per week		

Attachment B: Pre-Prep roll-out schedule

Year	LGAs	Priority cohorts	Hours
2025	6 regional LGAs: Ararat Rural City, Gannawarra Shire, Hindmarsh Shire, Murrindindi Shire, Northern Grampians Shire, Yarriambiack Shire		16 to 30 for 40 weeks of the year
2026	12 additional regional LGAs: Benalla Rural City, Buloke Shire, Corangamite Shire, East Gippsland Shire, Horsham Rural City, Loddon Shire, Mansfield Shire, Mitchell Shire, Pyrenees Shire, Strathbogie Shire, Wangaratta Rural City, Wodonga Rural City	State-wide roll-out to vulnerable children and Aboriginal children starts	16 to 30 for 40 weeks of the year
2027	12 additional regional LGAs: Alpine Shire, Central Goldfields Shire, Colac-Otway Shire, Glenelg Shire, Indigo Shire, Moira Shire, Moorabool Shire, Moyne Shire, South Gippsland Shire, Southern Grampians Shire, Swan Hill Rural City, West Wimmera Shire		16 to 30 for 40 weeks of the year
2028	15 additional regional LGAs: Bass Coast Shire, Baw Baw Shire, Campaspe Shire, Golden Plains Shire, Greater Shepparton City, Hepburn Shire, Latrobe City, Macedon Ranges Shire, Mildura Rural City, Mount Alexander Shire, Queenscliffe Borough, Surf Coast Shire, Towong Shire, Warrnambool City, Wellington Shire	State-wide roll-out to disadvantaged children starts	16 to 30 for 40 weeks of the year
2029	3 additional regional LGAs: Ballarat City, Greater Bendigo City, Greater Geelong City		16 to 30 for 40 weeks of the year
2030–2031	31 additional metropolitan LGAs: Banyule City, Bayside City, Boroondara City, Brimbank City, Cardinia Shire, Casey City, Darebin City, Frankston City, Glen Eira City, Greater Dandenong City, Hobsons Bay City, Hume City, Kingston City, Knox City, Manningham City, Maribyrnong City, Maroondah City, Melbourne City, Melton City, Merri-bek City, Monash City, Moonee Valley City, Mornington Peninsula Shire, Nillumbik Shire, Port Phillip City, Stonnington City, Whitehorse City, Whittlesea City, Wyndham City, Yarra City, Yarra Ranges Shire		2030: 16 to 20 for 40 weeks of the year 2031: 16 to 25 for 40 weeks of the year
2032	All Victoria		30 for 40 weeks of the year