

Fees and Attendance Policy and Procedure

Category:	Governance & Leadership (QA7)	Version:	7
Effective From:	January 2024	Next Review:	January 2025

Policy Statement

Our centre prides itself on providing quality care to all children and their families and providing a supportive working environment for educators. Our centre relies on the prompt payment of fees and strives to assist families in claiming relevant government benefits through the Child Care Subsidy System (CCS). This policy and procedure document aims to ensure that families are aware of their responsibilities in relation to the payment of fees and attendance records and aware of Child Care Subsidy requirements.

Background and Guiding Principles

Our centre uses CCS approved software to manage the attendance and charging of fees in compliance with Family Assistance Law. We comply with the requirements outlined in the Child Care Provider Handbook and aim to provide families with information to support them with subsidies such as Child Care Subsidy (CCS) and Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS). Families must also comply with these requirements to be eligible to receive subsidies.

Child Care Subsidy Key Points:

- Families are required to fulfill some basic requirements to be eligible to receive CCS including:
 - Child aged 13yrs and under.
 - Meet immunisation requirements.
 - Meet the residency requirements.
 - Be liable to pay for care provided (see Managing Third Party Payments below).
 - Families must accurately record attendance times at the service.
- There are three factors that will determine a family's level of CCS:
 - Combined Family Income
 - Activity Test – the activity level of both parents
 - Service Type – type of child care service
- CCS is generally paid directly to the service and passed onto families as a fee reduction, leaving families to pay the gap fee or out of pocket fee (difference between the fee charged and the subsidy amount)
- Families should contact Services Australia (CENTRELINK) in relation to queries about their entitlements based on family income and hours of work.
- You will be charged for all days booked regardless of attendance including absences and Holidays. CCS will be paid where eligible; up to 42 absence days per financial year including for Holidays. Additional absences may receive Child Care Subsidy after the initial 42days with approved documentation as per the Family Assistance Law requirements. In the event of a Pandemic which requires self-isolation of a child, as directed by Public Health or another government agency, families will still be responsible for fees payable unless otherwise advised. Each situation will be considered based on information on hand at the time and any change to this will be communicated to families.
- Families are required to enter into an agreement with the service for the planned arrangements for care. There are four types of arrangements:

- Complying Written Arrangement
- Relevant Arrangement
- Additional Child Care Subsidy (child wellbeing)—provider eligible arrangement
- arrangement with an organisation (third party).
- The agreement through which families can receive Child Care Subsidy is a Complying Written Arrangement (CWA). A Complying Written Arrangement is an agreement to provide care in return for fees.
- An arrangement must be recorded, either on paper or electronically, and must be kept by the service. An arrangement can cover more than one child if multiple children in a family will attend the same child care service (each child must have their own enrolment).
- Once a service enters into a Complying Written Arrangement with an individual, they must submit an enrolment notice within seven days of the end of the week in which the arrangement started. An agreement should not be made more than 14wks before care commences as it will be deemed exited before care begins.
- From 7 March 2022, eligible families with more than one child aged 5 or younger will get a higher CCS percentage. The percentage will be 30% higher for the younger child/ren up to a maximum of 95%.

Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS)

“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 childcare 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.”¹*

Child wellbeing is submitted by the centre, and all other types are managed directly between families and Centrelink. Where a child is identified as being at risk of serious abuse or neglect the centre must follow the guidance in the Child Care Provider Handbook and the Guide to Additional Child Care Subsidy (child wellbeing) including communication with government agencies. Under Child Wellbeing ACCS services must firstly submit a Certificate for a maximum of 6weeks, if further assistance is identified and documentation is provided by a relevant agency a Determination may be submitted up to a maximum of 13weeks.

ABSENCES

Child Care Subsidy is payable for up to 42 absence days for a child in a financial year for sessions of care a child is enrolled in and did not attend, but only for sessions of care where an individual still incurs a genuine fee liability to pay for the care. A reason does not need to be provided for a child’s initial 42 days of absence.

Once 42 absence days have occurred in a financial year, Child Care Subsidy can only be paid for any additional absences where they are taken for a reason set out in Family Assistance Law. These reasons are:

- the child, the individual who cares for the child, the individual's partner or another person with whom the child lives is ill and the service has been given a medical certificate by a medical practitioner
- the child is attending preschool
- alternative arrangements have been made on a pupil-free day
- the child has not been immunised against an infectious disease, the absence occurs during an immunisation grace period and a medical practitioner has certified that exposure to the infectious disease would pose a health risk to the child
- the absence is because the child is spending time with a person other than the individual who is their usual carer as required by a court order or a parenting plan, and the service has a copy of the relevant court order or parenting plan for the child
- the service is closed as a direct result of a period of local emergency
- the child cannot attend because of a local emergency (for example, because they are unable to travel to the service), during the period of the emergency or up to 28 days afterwards
- the individual who cares for the child has decided the child should not attend the service for up to seven days immediately following the end of a period of local emergency.

Statement of Entitlement

Your Statement of entitlement is readily accessible within your Xplor Home APP under "Finance". You can access this at any given time. This is only accessible by the person who is nominated on your account as the Primary Carer (generally the person who is responsible for claiming CCS)

Electronic Payments of GAP fees

Families using early childhood education and care must pay the gap fee electronically. Providers will take all reasonable steps to collect gap fees electronically.

Families fees will be deducted each fortnight via direct debit through XPLOR. Other payment options must be prior arranged in writing with the Director should you not wish to partake in the required Direct Debit of Fees.

Changes to enrolment

Two (2) weeks' written notice of intention to withdraw the child is required via email. The two weeks' notice begins from the close of business on the day the centre receives the written advice. Any monies owed to the parent will be refunded to the families nominated bank account following the child's last day with the centre. The Centre also requires a full two (2) weeks' written notice of an intention to change the days of attendance or the number of days. Change of days will be accommodated at our earliest convenience.

Procedures and Responsibilities

Leadership and Management Responsibilities, including Approved Providers, Nominated Supervisors and Responsible Persons will:

- Positively and clearly communicate all aspects of the policy and take a zero-tolerance approach to compliance.
- Understand and comply with all aspects of this policy and related legislation and support team members to do the same.
- Lead a culture of reflection and regular review of policies, seeking feedback from educators, families, children and other community agencies and professionals as appropriate.
- Support families to access subsidies, including where required ACCS and manage documentation as required. Abide by the requirements in both the Child Care Provider Handbook and the Guide to ACCS (Child wellbeing).
- Comply with all aspects of the Family Assistance Law and refer to the Child Care Provider Handbook.
- Ensure families are advised of fees, available subsidies, applicable bonds, enrolment fees and preferred payment methods at the time of enquiry and enrolment. Keep Family handbooks up to date.
- Ensure families enter into one of the 4 enrolment arrangements. Assist families to complete a Complying Written Arrangement (CWA) using the Enrolment Booking Form where CCS is being claimed.
- Provide 14 days' notice of a change in fees or the way fees are charged.
- Ensure families are provided with information on the fee structure including any deposits, bonds or enrolment fees. Specify if any fees are non-refundable and applicable conditions.
- Apply Start Strong Funding Fee Relief strictly in accordance with the spending rules, including to reduce out-of-pocket expenses for families, resulting in a fee reduction for eligible children after the Child Care Subsidy is deducted from the relevant fee.
- Work with families to manage the payment of accounts, set payment plans where required and, in the absence of compliance with the policy of remaining one week in advance, suspend or cancel care.
- Ensure session hours are accurately recorded and reported.
- Provide reminders for leadership, educators and families around accurately recording children's attendance.
- Ensure other persons using CCS software or with responsibilities for monitoring attendance are aware of their responsibilities.
- Ensure manual paper back up sign in and out sheets are available in the event of a failure of electronic sign in functions.
- Ensure all information is entered into CCS approved software accurately and promptly.
- Must document payment plans in writing and show evidence of all attempts to collect gap fees from families.
- Must collect all fees electronically, cash and cheque are no longer acceptable means of payment as per the 1 July 2023 changes to Family Assistance Law.

Educators and Other Team Members will:

- Be proactive in fulfilling the requirements of this service policy and related legislative requirements.
- Seek further guidance where required to fulfil your requirements.
- Report any concerns or non-compliance immediately to the Nominated Supervisor or

Approved Provider.

- Participate in the review of documents and provide constructive feedback to the Nominated Supervisor or Approved Provider.
- Ensure accurate records of attendance for children in your group.
- Mark or confirm attendance/absences using the CCS approved software/documentation
- Advise the Nominated Supervisor of any of the following:
 - Child was absent on expected first or last day of attendance
 - Child has been absent for more than 1wk without notice

As part of enrolment terms and conditions, families are asked to:

- Fulfil responsibilities under this policy and related legislative requirements.
- Discuss any questions with the Nominated Supervisor or Responsible Person in charge.
- Understand and ensure that fees must be paid in accordance with the centre collection of fees system unless alternate written agreements have been made.
- Where CCS subsidies have been connected to the service, pay the full fee until subsidies are approved and communicated electronically to the service through the CCS approved software.
- Acknowledge that fees are payable less any subsidies communicated to the service through the CCS approved software. Where a subsidy has changed, families are still responsible for the full fee less any benefits communicated to the service regarding Child Care Subsidy payments. In some circumstances this may be the full fee.
- Only pay fees using electronic methods not cash or cheque unless there is a requirement for an exemption due to family or domestic violence risks.
- Understand that gap fees cannot be salary sacrificed, these must be treated as a third-party payment which will vary the CCS amount. Ask us for more information if you require.
- Understand that gap fees are required to be paid to be eligible for CCS. The service must demonstrate to the department of education all reasonable attempts to recover gap fees from families including documenting payment plans.
- Adhere to payment plans where these are in place to maintain enrolment and CCS eligibility.
- Provide 2 weeks' notice to cancel, add or reduce booked days.
- Ensure all fees are finalised by the end of each financial year and before close of business over the Christmas.
- Understand that an increase in days is subject to availability.
- Confirm your child's bookings through your MyGov account.
- Notify the service of any changes to Child Care Subsidy hours or %.
- **Always sign your child in and out of the service and acknowledge absent days.**
- Pay for all days booked, including absences for illness and holidays
- Attend on both the first and last day of care to be eligible for Child Care Subsidy.
- Advise the service of any expected absences with reasons for absence.
- Provide a medical certificate or other documentation to meet the Additional Absence criteria for days absent after the initial 42days or for up to 7days after the last physical day of attendance when ending bookings.
- Ensure records provided are accurate and fully completed.
- Accurately record each child's attendance for every day of care including in and out times and names of each person who delivered and collected the child.
- Notify the service if your child is claiming Start Strong Fee Relief at another service and understand that you are only eligible to claim at one program.
- Complete the Start Strong Consent Forms where your child is enrolled in an approved, funded Preschool Program.

Enforcement

The Failure of any person to comply with this policy in its entirety may lead to:

- Termination or modification of child enrolment
- Restriction of access to the service
- Performance management of an employee which may lead to termination

Related Policies and Forms

- Enrolment Form
- Enrolment and Orientation Policy and Procedure
- Arrival and Departure Policy and Procedure

Legislation, Recognised Authorities and Sources

- *“Child Care Provider Handbook”*, October 2023 Department of Education (accessed on-line Feb 2024) <https://www.education.gov.au/child-care-package/child-care-provider-handbook>
- *“Additional Child Care Subsidy Child Wellbeing – Guide for early childhood education and care providers and services”* Oct 2023 Australian Department of Education (accessed on-line Feb 2024) <https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/resources/guide-additional-child-care-subsidy-child-wellbeing>
- *“Third-party payment of gap fees”* Australian Government Department of Education (accessed on-line Feb 2024) <https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/child-care-subsidy/payments-and-fees/third-party-payments>
- *“Electronic Payment of Gap Fees”* Australian Government Department of Education (accessed on-line Feb 2024) <https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/provider-obligations/electronic-payment-gap-fees>
- *“Guide to the National Quality Framework”* Australian Children’s Education & Care Quality Authority Oct 2023
- *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* (version Nov 2023)
- *Education and Care Services National Regulations* (version Oct 2023)
 - 168 Education and care service must have policies and procedures
 - 170 Policies and procedures to be followed
 - 171 Policies and procedures to be kept available
 - 172 Notification of change in policies or procedures affecting ability of family to utilise service
- National Quality Standards
 - 7.1.2 Management systems

Review Information

Version	Date Reviewed	Approved By	Comments/Amendments	Next Review Date
1	30 December 2020	Dr Brenda Abbey (Author)	Updated references.	
2	23 December 2020	Kylie Showman (Director)	Amended to comply with Gidgillys protocols and procedures	-
3	3 May 2021	Kylie Showman (Director)	Updated to include fee schedule and late collection fee	-
4	4 th January 2022	Erin Shortland (Director)	Updated fee schedule	-
5	16 th June 2023	Erin Shortland (Director)	- Updated Fee Schedule for new financial year - Changed payment option to new software provider	Jan 2024 or as required
6	10 th January 2024	Erin Shortland (Director)	-Amended Layout and included all supporting evidence from ACA NSW updates relevant to our centre -Changes direct debit system and ways to pay fees to align with new Family law requirements	January 2025 or if under financial review