

# Two years are better than one

## Kindergarten programs in Victoria

The Victorian Government's commitment to the early years is reaping benefits, with some of the highest rates of participation in the country.

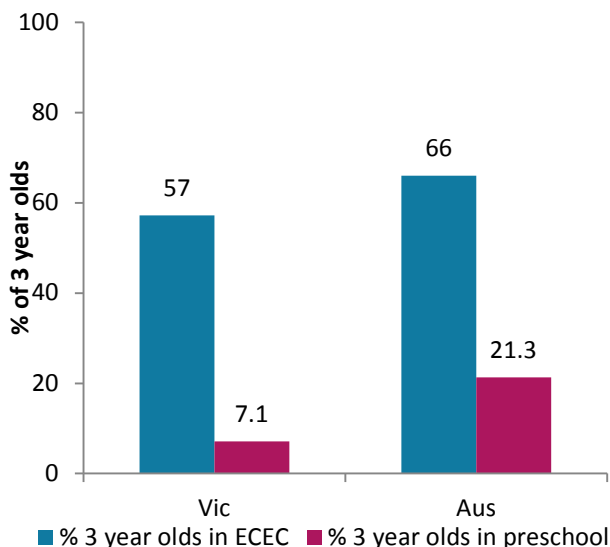
Victoria also has a clear commitment to kindergarten access for the three year olds that stand to benefit the most.

### 3 year olds enrolled in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and kindergarten

There are fewer Victorian 3 year olds attending ECEC than the national average.

- 57 per cent of 3 year olds are enrolled in ECEC (in long day care, sessional kindergarten and family day care)
- 7 per cent of 3 year olds are enrolled in kindergarten programs (this figure under-represents Victorian kindergarten participation because of the way data is collected)

Figure 1: Proportion of 3 year olds enrolled in all ECEC and preschool (Preschool Education, Australia 2015 and ROGS 2016)



### Policy and funding for 3 year old kindergarten programs

Victoria is one of three states to have specific policy and funding for 3 year old kindergarten programs.

The Early Start Kindergarten program provides up to 15 hours for 40 weeks per year of free or low cost kindergarten to 3 year old children who are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; or
- have been in contact with child protection or the early intervention service, ChildFIRST.

The subsidy ranges from around \$4700 to \$7400 per child, depending on whether the service is urban or regional.

### Progress towards Universal Access for 4 year olds

Victoria's enrolment and attendance rates for 4 year old kindergarten are above the national average.

- 100 per cent of children are enrolled in kindergarten programs in the year before school
- 83 per cent are attending for 15 hours or more (noting data is collected in a reference week and under-estimates actual attendance across the year)

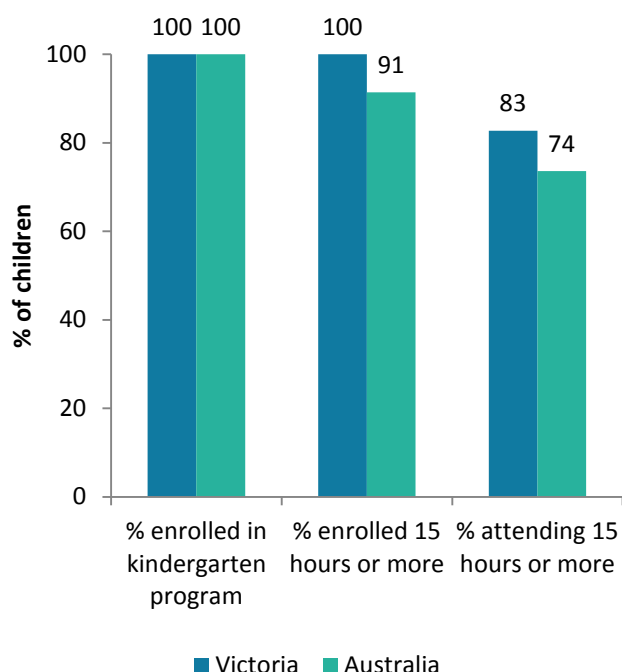
### What is kindergarten?

Kindergarten is a play-based, learning-focused program.

In Australia, kindergarten programs are provided for children for 600 hours in the year before school (4-5 years) and are delivered by an Early Childhood Teacher.

There is no national kindergarten program for 3 year olds, but some children attend programs delivered by an Early Childhood Teacher.

Figure 2: Proportion of children enrolled in year before school preschool programs (Preschool Education, Australia 2015). Note: totals have been capped at 100%



### Policy and funding for 4 year olds

Victoria provides funding to kindergarten services for each child attending a kindergarten program.

- Most children are funded with a per-child amount between around \$3,300 and \$6,200 depending on location.
- The kindergarten fee subsidy provides a top up of around \$1,400 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, holders of health or concession cards, or those on humanitarian visas.
- Grants of around \$550 to \$1,800 are made to non-government schools operating kindergarten programs, with the higher rate going to schools in lower socio-economic areas.

Victoria also invests in Early Years Management, a nearly \$10,000 per annum grant that supports the management of nearly 40 per cent of funded kindergarten services.

The program has a strong focus on improving access and participation in kindergarten for vulnerable children and families, and fostering a more integrated early years system.

This initiative is unique to Victoria and has reduced the management burden services face and improved access to high quality professional learning.

### Strategies to boost attendance of priority cohorts

Victoria invests in a range of strategies to boost participation for priority cohorts, including:

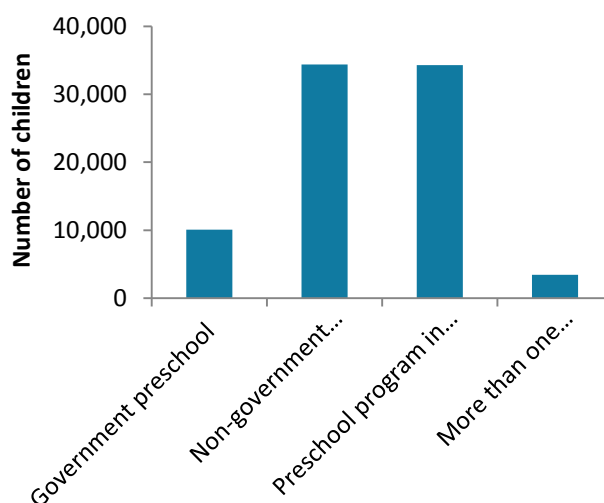
- Kindergarten Fee Subsidy – enables eligible children experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage to access free or low-cost kindergarten.
- Early Start Kindergarten Program – 3 year old Aboriginal children and children known to child protection are funded to access free or low cost kindergarten.
- Access to Early Learning Program – a service model currently delivered in 7 local areas that builds the capacity of ECEC services to meet the needs of vulnerable children, to work more effectively with families, and to work more collaboratively with the broader child and family service system.
- Koorie Engagement Support Officers/ Koorie Kindergarten Assistants Program – specialist staff who provide information and support to the families of Indigenous children, communities, kindergarten staff and management.
- Additional funding - if a child is developmentally delayed, they can receive funding for a second year of kindergarten.

### Who provides kindergarten?

There is a mixed market of provision in Victoria, with children attending kindergarten programs in government and non-government services, as well as in long day care settings.

A higher proportion of children attend sessional kindergarten than programs in LDC settings.

Figure 3: Number of children attending kindergarten per sector (Preschool Education, Australia 2015)

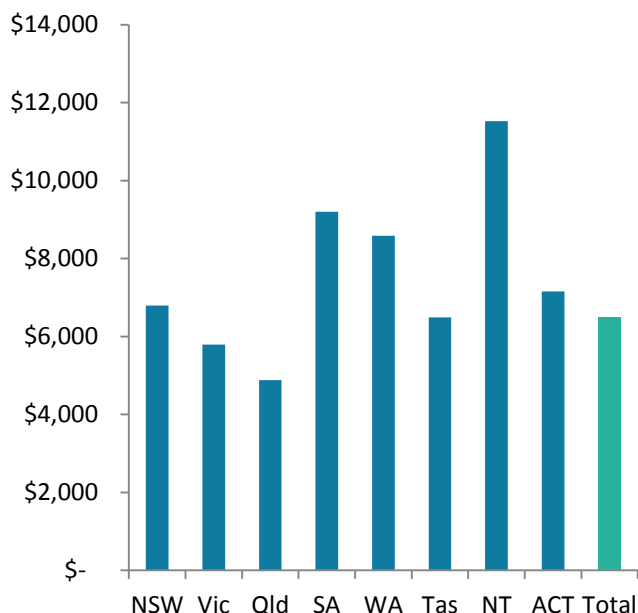


## Universal Access funding

Total per-child expenditure in Victoria is below the national average.

Parents pay a slightly higher proportion of total preschool expenditure than the national average.

Figure 4: Estimated per-child expenditure on preschool (combined Australian Government, state and territory government and parent contributions) 2012-13 (Productivity Commission 2015)



Nearly a quarter of Australian children arrive at school without the foundational skills they need to thrive. A child's risk of being developmentally vulnerable is closely correlated with their socio-economic status, meaning that before they have even started school, these children's chances are more influenced by where they were born than by their own innate abilities. These inequalities often increase as children progress through school.

Access to a high quality preschool program is one of the few proven strategies for lifting outcomes for all children, and evidence suggests that two years has more impact than one, especially for the children most likely to be developmentally vulnerable.

Mitchell Institute's new report, *Two Years are Better than One*, makes the case for preschool programs for 3 year olds.

The report is available at:

[www.mitchellinstitute.org.au](http://www.mitchellinstitute.org.au)