

Early Years Fees Policy

Purpose

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- The setting, payment and collection of fees.
- Ensuring the viability of Early Years Programs, by setting appropriate fees and charges.
- The equitable and non-discriminatory fees across all Mallee Track Health and Community Services (MTHCS) Early Years Services.

Scope

MTHCS Early Years services including Child Care and Kindergarten programs.

Definitions

- **Child Care Safety Net:** Government body funding to provide targeted assistance for disadvantaged communities and vulnerable children and their families while supporting parents into work. This has three components 1. Child Care Subsidy, 2. Additional Child Care Subsidy and 3. Community Child Care Subsidy.
- **Centrepay:** Centrepay is a free bill paying service. Families can use Centrepay to arrange regular deductions from their Centrelink payment direct to MTHCS. Refer to [Centrepay - What Centrepay is - Services Australia](#).
- **Catastrophic Rating:** (previously known as Code Red) Declared by the Department of Health to support safety of the community during extreme weather conditions. Services must close on this day and staff and children are not to be onsite.
- **Complying Written Arrangement:** A written arrangement between a childcare provider and an individual to provide child care in return for fees. The Complying Written Arrangement is completed online via Xap.
- **Concession Cards:** A Commonwealth Government entitlement providing concessions for low-income earners and other eligible people. Details are available at: <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/subjects/concession-and-health-care-cards>
- **Custom Data Support:** Independent agency that provides administrative support to MTHCS to ensure we are meeting the compliance requirements to administer the CCS.
- **Declaration:** Agreement from families to abide by the policies, procedures and requirements of the Early Years services, signed online via Xap.
- **Early Start Kindergarten:** A funding program that enables three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection, to attend a kindergarten program that is planned and delivered by an early childhood teacher for a specific number of hours. Details are available at: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/child-care-kindergarten/Pages/early-start-kindergarten.aspx>
- **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](#).
- **Family Assistance Law:** Broad term that encompasses a number of different legislation outlined in policies legislation section.
- **Fees:** A charge for a place within a program at the service.
- **High Debt:** An account that has accumulated a debt of \$400 or higher, or has not made a payment for 4 or more weeks
- **Inclusion Support:** The Inclusion Support Program is designed to assist child care services to include children with additional needs by providing tailored inclusion advice and support from contracted Inclusion Agencies as well as funding to address more challenging inclusion barriers. It funds providers to build their ability to include children with additional needs in mainstream services so that these children can learn and develop alongside their peers.
- **Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS):** A state government subsidy paid directly to the funded service to enable eligible families to attend a funded kindergarten program or funded three-year-old place at no cost (or minimal cost) to promote participation. Details are available at: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/child-care-kindergarten/Pages/how-much-kindergarten-cost.aspx>

Prompt Doc No: MTH0146767		Page 1 of 11
Version Number: 4.1	Reviewed by: EYPL	Last Reviewed: 28/06/2024
UNCONTROLLED WHEN DOWNLOADED	Authorised by: Director of Community Services	Next Review Due: 28/06/2027

- **Kindergarten Fee Subsidy – Fees Policy:** Provides operational guidelines for services administering the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy and can be found in the Victorian kindergarten policy, procedures and funding criteria available at:
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/kinderdatacollection.aspx>
- **Late Collection Charge:** A charge that may be imposed by the Approved Provider, Licensee when parents/guardians are late to collect their child/children from the program.
- **Provider Entry Point (PEP):** Part of the Child Care Subsidy System through which providers can apply for provider and service approval. PEP enables them to access information, add or remove a service, make notice of a change in their circumstances, and give enrolment notices and session reports for Child Care Subsidy.
- **Relevant Arrangement:** An arrangement between the provider and individual for the care of a child which does not meet the requirements for a Complying Written Arrangement. This type of enrolment notice is used where a provider is sure the family does not wish to claim Child Care Subsidy for the sessions of care they are going to provide or the eligibility is not confirmed.
- **Voluntary Parents / Guardians Contribution:** A voluntary payment for items not directly related to the provision of the children’s program. Attendance at the service is not conditional on this payment.
- **Xap:** Online software and app for the management of our Early Years services including administration, communication, enrolment, bookings and invoicing

Accountability

MTHCS 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.
- Ensuring there are no financial barriers for parents/guardians wishing to access an early childhood program for their child/children.
- Maintaining confidentiality in relation to the financial circumstances of parents/guardians.
- Advising users of the service about program funding, including government support and fees to be paid by parents/guardians.
- Providing equitable access for families eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy.
- Providing equitable access for families eligible for the Child Care Subsidy and Additional Child Care Subsidy.
- supporting the Victorian Government’s Free Kinder initiative
- increasing access to quality kindergarten programs for all Victorian children

Prompt Doc No: MTH0146767		Page 2 of 11
Version Number: 4.1	Reviewed by: EYPL	Last Reviewed: 28/06/2024
UNCONTROLLED WHEN DOWNLOADED	Authorised by: Director of Community Services	Next Review Due: 28/06/2027

Early Years Fees Policy

Responsibilities	Approved provider and persons with management or control	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge	ECT Educators and all other staff	Parents/guardians	Contractors Volunteers and students
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 (Regulation 168), and take reasonable steps to ensure those policies and procedures are followed (Regulation 170)	●	●			
Reviewing the current budget to determine fee income requirements	●	●			
Developing a fee policy that balances the parent's/guardian's capacity to pay, with providing a high-quality program and maintaining service viability	●	●			
Implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with parents/guardians, the nominated supervisor and staff, and in line with the requirements of the Commonwealth Governments Child Care Subsidy and Additional Child Care Subsidy	●	●			
Reviewing the effectiveness of the procedures for late payment and support offered	●	●			
Considering options for payment when affordability is an issue for families	●	●			
Clearly communicating this policy and payment options to families in a culturally sensitive way, and where possible in the family's first language	●	●			

Early Years Fees Policy

Ensuring that the <i>Fees Policy</i> is readily accessible at the service (<i>Regulation 171</i>)	●	●			
Providing all parents/guardians with fee information	●	●			
Providing all parents/guardians with a statement of fees and charges upon enrolment of their child/ren	●	●			
Providing all parents/guardians with a fee payment agreement	●	●			
Ensuring fees are collected and receipted	●	●			
Collecting all relevant information and maintaining relevant documentation regarding those with entitlement to concessions, where applicable	●	●		●	
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	●	●			
Notifying parents/guardians 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>)	●	●			
Addressing any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service in a timely manner	●	●			
Reading Fee information for families, and complying with the Fee Payment Agreement				●	
Notifying the approved provider 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	●	●			

Ensuring that any surplus funding is used in line with acceptable uses of kindergarten funding, including to promote increased participation and/or enhance program quality	●	●			
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Procedures

Fees & Sessions:

Long Day Care sessions are charged by the session with a rate of \$12.00 per hour.

Families accessing Long Day Care sessions are eligible to apply for Child Care Subsidy and Additional Child Care Subsidy. Long Day Care sessions available include:

- Murrayville ELC: full day session, half day session, wrap around session (kinder children only), after school session (school children only)
- Ouyen Child Care: full day session, half day session, kinder half day session (kinder children only)
- Ouyen Preschool: wrap around session
- Sea Lake ELC: full day session, half day session, wrap around session (kinder children only), after school session (school children only)
- Underbool ELC: full day session, half day session, wrap around session (kinder children only), after school session (school children only)

Kindergarten session fees for 3 and 4 year old kinder are covered by the Victorian Government’s Free Kinder Initiative. Any future changes to this initiative resulting in changes to kindergarten fees will be communicated to families in line with regulatory requirements. Kindergarten sessions available include:

- Manangatang Preschool: 3 & 4 Year Old Kinder
- Murrayville ELC: 3 & 4 Year Old Kinder
- Ouyen Preschool: 3 & 4 Year Old Kinder
- Sea Lake ELC: 3 & 4 Year Old Kinder
- Underbool ELC: 3 & 4 Year Old Kinder

Families are only able to claim funded kinder from one service at a time. If families are already accessing funded kinder at another service, termly fees or Long Day Care fees will apply depending on the relevant booking.

Funded Early Start Kindergarten:

Is free or low cost kindergarten to eligible three year old children where programs are offered by a qualified teacher. Applications for Early Start Kindergarten funding are made by the service on your behalf and the grant is paid directly to the service.

Your child is eligible for Early Start Kindergarten if they are:

- Aged three by 30 April in the year they will be attending a kindergarten program and;
- Your child is Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; or
- Your family has had contact with Child Protection (or been referred by them to Child FIRST).
- Details on fee subsidy are available at: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/child-care-kindergarten/Pages/how-much-kindergarten-cost.aspx>

Child Care Subsidy (CCS) & Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS):

The Child Care Subsidy (CCS) is a program by the Australian Government designed to assist families with the cost of child care.

Prompt Doc No: MTH0146767		Page 5 of 11
Version Number: 4.1	Reviewed by: EYPL	Last Reviewed: 28/06/2024
UNCONTROLLED WHEN DOWNLOADED	Authorised by: Director of Community Services	Next Review Due: 28/06/2027

Early Years Fees Policy

- **Eligibility:** To be eligible for CCS, you must care for a child 13 or younger who's not attending secondary school (unless an exemption applies), use an approved child care service, be responsible for paying the child care fees, and meet residency and immunisation requirements.
- **Payment:** The subsidy is generally paid directly to providers, who then pass it on to families as a fee reduction.
- **Amount:** The amount of subsidy you can receive depends on your family's income, the type of child care service, and the number of hours of care used.

To claim the Child Care Subsidy and Additional Child Care Subsidy, families will need to complete an online Child Care Subsidy assessment using their Centrelink online account through MyGov:

<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/online-help/centrelink/claim-child-care-subsidy?from=groupmessage&isappinstalled=0>

Any family that is claiming CCS will need to complete a Complying Written Arrangement (CWA) electronically on Xap.

Invoices & Statements:

- Invoices are issued electronically via Xap on a fortnightly Wednesday, charging 2 weeks in arrears of service provided.
- Families can access their invoices and a running statement via the Xap Smile app to view updates to bookings charged, payments made toward their account, due dates of payments and overdue balances.
- Accounts will be charged out 4 weeks before the end of financial year, which is expected to be paid in full before the end of financial year.
- MTHCS receive compliance advice from Custom Data Support on an ongoing basis to ensure we are compliant with Family Assistance Law in administering the requirements of the commonwealth funding received through the CCS.

Overdue Fees & High Debts:

- Fees are due to be paid on the first Friday after invoices have been issued. If fees have not been paid by this time, families will receive an automated reminder email from Xap notifying them that their account is overdue.
- Families with a high debt will receive a notice in writing outlining the amount owing, due date, payment options and consequences of failure to make payment or alternate agreement.
- Payment options include: full payment, half payment or payment plan agreement
- Payments will be monitored
- If after 2 weeks of being notified of your high debt a full payment, half payment or payment plan agreement has not been made, management will suspend children's bookings.

If there are difficulties associated with the payment of fees, we welcome the opportunity to discuss this in preference to suspending or cancelling your booking. All discussions will be treated in confidence and with sensitivity.

Our goal is to ensure your child/s participation in the program whilst working pro- actively to respond to any financial barriers which may prevent participation.

Families who no longer attend an early year's service, but has a remaining debt will be handed over to MTHCS administration team for debt collection process to be followed.

Payment Plans:

- Families who are having genuine difficulty paying their fees will be encouraged to commence a payment plan with the EYPL /EYM.
- The payment plan will be designed to clear debts while maintaining regular payments, and it will be sustainable for both parties. The recommended payment each fortnight is 25% - 50% (% may change depending on families ability to pay) of the family's regular fees in addition to any new fees accruing.

Prompt Doc No: MTH0146767		Page 6 of 11
Version Number: 4.1	Reviewed by: EYPL	Last Reviewed: 28/06/2024
UNCONTROLLED WHEN DOWNLOADED	Authorised by: Director of Community Services	Next Review Due: 28/06/2027

Early Years Fees Policy

- The EYPL/EYM will write the payment plan and any terms of agreement, and the family and EYPL/EYM will sign a copy for each to keep.

Payment Options:

- Online Bank Transfer – Regular reoccurring payment to MTHCS set up through your own online banking
BSB: 083776
Account number: 250918711
Account name: Mallee Track Health
- Centrepay – Families can request this option and will be required to complete the necessary documentation. Early Years Administration will scan signed Centrepay documentation to MTHCS Administration for processing.
- EFTPOS or cash – these options are available at MTHCS main campus Administration only (Ouyen and Sea Lake).
Our Early Years facilities do not handle Eftpos or cash payments.

Refunds:

Upon ceasing enrolment at our Early Years Services, if an account is paid in full and in credit, the amount will be refunded to the family.

Refunds requested by a family outside of these circumstances will be considered on a case by case basis.

To action the refund, the family must provide bank details for the amount to be refunded to and the EYPL or EYM must complete a Payment Voucher.

Bookings & attendance:

All booking offers will be made electronically via Xap. Refer to the Enrolment and Orientation Policy.

Permanent bookings

- Permanent bookings are a regular, reoccurring booking.
- Permanent bookings will be charged when a child is absent.
- Permanent bookings will be charged on public holidays.
- Permanent bookings will be charged on Local Emergency Days including Catastrophic Weather days.
- Families will not be charged if it is a service decision to cancel bookings or close a service.

Casual bookings

Casual bookings are able to be requested as needed or families can choose to remain on a casual wait list on a weekly basis.

Casual bookings will be cancelled before any permanent bookings when workforce issues are experienced by the service.

Casual bookings that consist of bookings of 3 or more sessions on a regular basis (i.e. 3 Mondays in a row, 3 consecutive days, etc.) will be treated as a permanent booking for that period.

Prompt Doc No: MTH0146767		Page 7 of 11
Version Number: 4.1	Reviewed by: EYPL	Last Reviewed: 28/06/2024
UNCONTROLLED WHEN DOWNLOADED	Authorised by: Director of Community Services	Next Review Due: 28/06/2027

Early Years Fees Policy

Requesting Casual Bookings:

Casual bookings can be requested via the Early Years Administration team via:

Text Message 0437 337 854

Phone call 5091 0292 **OR**

Email enrolments@methcs.vic.gov.au

Stating Child's name, day, date, session type and service e.g. John Citizen Monday 25-6-18 Full Day Ouyen CC.

A member of the Early Years Administration team will confirm availability of casual bookings in writing via text or email.

Late Collection Fee

- Each Centres opening and closing times must be strictly adhered to.
- It is the parent's responsibility to have taken the child into their care by these times.

If a child is collected late:

- Early Years Staff will notify Admin, the EYPL or EYM, who will record this information on the Booking Sheet
- The parent will still sign the child out on Sign in/sign out Kiosk.
- Early Years Staff will assist the family by having a conversation about alternate arrangements that could be made for the collection of the child.
- EYPL or EYM will contact the parent to notify them of their first and final late collection warning.
- If a child is recorded as being collected late after the first and final warning, a late fine will be imposed to meet additional staff costs: \$1 per minute per child.
- If a family collects their child/ren late a further 2 times, the fine will double.
- Continued dishonour of collection times may result in the suspension or ceasing of bookings.

If we are unable to contact a Guardian or Nominee from the child's enrolment and a parent has not contacted the Centre by end of session/day:

- Staff will wait with the child until parents or authorised nominees can be contacted.
- A member of management or another Early Years staff member may be called in to allow staff to go home.
- Police may be called to assist in locating parents.

Absences:

- The Family Assistance Law allows for 42 absent days per child, per financial year for which Child Care Subsidy are received. These absences can be taken for any reason, without the need for families to provide documentation. This is to ensure continuity of CCS for families where they are required to pay for child care when their child/ren are absent from care, Due to situations such as illness (for the child, parent, sibling or other individual with whom the child lives), parental leave and other absence reasons.
- If a child is absent for more than one session of care on the same day, this is counted as one absence. For example, one absence will be counted where a child is absent for both Kindergarten and after Kinder Wrap Around sessions on the same day.
- MTHCS keep records of each absence for each child, and both families and services will have visibility (through the MyGov and Provider portals) of a child's year to date absence count.
- If your child has a permanent booking and they will be absent, you are required to contact the Early Years Administration team located at the central office at Ouyen Child Care as soon as possible. A message can be left on the answering machine or mobile after-hours.
- Absences will be noted, dated and initialled on the booking sheet.
- Normal fees will be billed for all absentees.

Prompt Doc No: MTH0146767		Page 8 of 11
Version Number: 4.1	Reviewed by: EYPL	Last Reviewed: 28/06/2024
UNCONTROLLED WHEN DOWNLOADED	Authorised by: Director of Community Services	Next Review Due: 28/06/2027

Greater than 42 absent days:

If a child is absent for more than 42 days in a financial year, your service may still be able to charge a fee to families and receive the subsidy. However, for this to occur, the absence must be due to specific reasons or full fees for your booking will be charged.

There is no limit on these days but you may be required to provide documentation to support the absence.

The additional absence days reasons are:

- Illness (with a medical certificate), or another absence due to sickness of the child, a carer, carer's partner or sibling, supported by medical certificates.
- Temporary closure of a school or pupil-free days.
- Up to 28 days following a period of local emergency and the service is closed or the child is unable to travel to the service due to the emergency.
- Shared care arrangements due to a court order, parenting plan or parenting order, where a copy has been provided to the service.
- The child is not immunised, the absence occurs during the immunisation grace period and a medical practitioner certifies exposure to the infectious disease would pose a health risk to the child.
- Attendance at Preschool.

Ceasing a booking:

- If a child does not attend any session for 14 consecutive weeks, their enrolment will automatically end and all absences reported during this period would need to be repaid.
- Should you wish to end your child's permanent booking at any service, you must provide written notice to the Early Years Administration 2 weeks in advance.
- Should you wish to cancel your child's casual booking, you must give notice to the Early Years Administration by 3:00pm the afternoon before your child is due to attend. If this does not occur, the normal booking fee will be charged.
- If the child is un-enrolling from a Kindergarten session, the EYM must be notified as soon as possible. This change must be updated in the KIM system.

Child Care Subsidy Cessation of Care

- An enrolment will end for Child Care Subsidy purposes if a child does not attend a session of care for 14 continuous weeks. The provider will be notified after four weeks of no sessions of care being reported. If the child starts attending the service again after 14 weeks or more, the provider will need to re-establish the Complying Written Arrangement with the individual and submit a new enrolment notice.
- No Child Care Subsidy or Additional Child Care Subsidy is payable for any session of care that occurs after the last day a child physically attended care at the provider.
- This means that if a provider submits absences for a child after the last day a child physically attended child care, no Child Care Subsidy or Additional Child Care Subsidy is payable for those absences, and any Child Care Subsidy or Additional Child Care Subsidy that is paid for these absences must be returned to the Australian Government.
- This also applies to enrolment notices which are automatically ended by the Child Care Subsidy System or where the provider ends an enrolment notice by updating it with an end date.
- Similarly, a child care service is taken to have permanently ceased providing care for a child on the day the child last physically attends a session of care under an enrolment. This means that absences submitted after a child last physically attends a session of care are not eligible for Child Care Subsidy.
- If a family has confirmed their child's last day at a service, but that child does not attend their last booked session of care, no Child Care Subsidy will be paid for any days after the child's last physical attendance at the service.
- If a provider continues to charge fees for sessions on days after a child has left the service because the family did not give the agreed period of notice, Child Care Subsidy will not be payable for these sessions of care. If

Prompt Doc No: MTH0146767		Page 9 of 11
Version Number: 4.1	Reviewed by: EYPL	Last Reviewed: 28/06/2024
UNCONTROLLED WHEN DOWNLOADED	Authorised by: Director of Community Services	Next Review Due: 28/06/2027

Early Years Fees Policy

absences are reported in the above circumstances and Child Care Subsidy is incorrectly paid, these amounts must be remitted to Services Australia and if not will be recovered from the service.

Related Documents:

- Centrepay Deduction Authority Consent Form
- Payment Plan Agreement
- Payment Voucher
- Complaints and Grievances Policy
- Delivery and Collection of Children Policy
- Enrolment and Orientation Policy
- Excursions and Service Events Policy
- Inclusion and Equity Policy
- Privacy and Confidentiality Policy Early Years

References:

- Child Care Provider Handbook current version at:
<https://www.dese.gov.au/resources-child-care-providers/child-care-provider-handbook>
- Child Care Subsidy Minister's Rules 2017, as amended at:
<https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2021C00823> Victorian kindergarten policy, procedures and funding criteria:
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/kinderfundingcriteria.aspx>
- The Constitution of Preschool
[Child Care Subsidy - Services Australia](#)

Background & Legislation:

Funding for Kindergarten programs is through the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET). Refer to the [Kindergarten Program Funding Guide](#).

Funding for Kindergarten programs is through the Victorian Department of Education (DE). Refer to the Kindergarten Program Funding Guide. Free Kinder is available in Three- and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten programs across Victoria at participating services. Kinder services offering Free Kinder receive funding directly from the Victorian Government. MTHCS kindergartens receive the rural per capita funding as a contribution towards the costs of the three and four year-old kindergarten program. Income from other sources, is required to meet all the additional costs incurred by the service in the delivery of the children's program.

Kindergartens also receive School Readiness Funding (SRF) to support equity. This funding is based off Departmental Equity (Social Disadvantage) data for the year prior enrolments at the service.

Funding to support the Child Care service is received through the Commonwealth Department of Education's Child Care subsidy scheme. Refer to the [Child Care Provider Handbook](#) for up to date information on this funding.

A set fee per hour for families is charged to access the service. Families are encouraged to apply through MyGov for the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) and/or Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS). The CCS and ACCS is paid to MTHCS and passed on to parents/guardians in the form of a fee reduction. The fee reduction is based on combined family income and activity test that families are required to complete through their MyGov account.

There are 3 components of the child care package:

- Child Care Subsidy (CCS): simplified and streamlined means tested CCS with a minimum level of activity required to be eligible.
- Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS): to provide targeted assistance for disadvantaged communities, vulnerable children, and their families to access child care by reducing or in some cases eliminating the out of pocket contribution required by parents under the CCS while supporting parents into work. There are 4

Prompt Doc No: MTH0146767		Page 10 of 11
Version Number: 4.1	Reviewed by: EYPL	Last Reviewed: 28/06/2024
UNCONTROLLED WHEN DOWNLOADED	Authorised by: Director of Community Services	Next Review Due: 28/06/2027

Early Years Fees Policy



elements of ACCS which provide additional subsidy support for CCS eligible families who meet specific criteria. These are child well-being and/or grandparent carers and/or transition to work and/or temporary financial hardship.

- Community Child Care Fund (CCCF): provides supplementary funding through both a competitive and a restricted non-competitive grant opportunity (eligible to Budget Based Funded specified services) to provide sustainability support for eligible child care services to operate viably and ensure continuity of child care services during transition.

Staff and families are encouraged to go to the [Australian Government Services Australia website](#) to learn more about their subsidy including withholding amount and end of year balancing.

Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic) Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)

Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 Children's Services Regulations 2020

Children's Services Act 1996 Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)

Family Assistance Law is a broad term that encompasses the following legislation:

A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999

A New Tax System (Family Assistance) (Administration) Act 1999

Child Care Subsidy Minister's Rules 2017 (Minister's Rules)

Child Care Subsidy Secretary's Rules 2017 (Secretary's Rules)

Any other instruments (including regulations) made under the A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999 and the

A New Tax System (Family Assistance) (Administration) Act 1999

Schedules 5 and 6 to the A New Tax System (Family Assistance and Related Measures) Act 2000

Prompt Doc No: MTH0146767		Page 11 of 11
Version Number: 4.1	Reviewed by: EYPL	Last Reviewed: 28/06/2024
UNCONTROLLED WHEN DOWNLOADED	Authorised by: Director of Community Services	Next Review Due: 28/06/2027