



Every Child, Our Future Children's Services Policy

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Children's Services Policy

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Manager, Family, Youth and Children

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Contents

Womin Jeka	4
Definitions	5
Purpose.....	6
Outcomes.....	6
Commitment to Child Safety	7
Background	7
Scope.....	8
Policy Objectives	9
Objective 1.....	9
Objective 2.....	9
Objective 3.....	9
Objective 4.....	9
Objective 5.....	9
Objective 6.....	9
Objective 7.....	9
Policy Commitments.....	10
Monitoring Effectiveness	12
Early indicators of success.....	12
Outcomes for children and families	12
Longer-term impacts for children and families.....	13
Policy Limitations.....	14
Policy Review.....	14
Relevant Policy, Regulations and Legislation	15
Human Rights.....	15
Government Delivery of Goods and Services.....	15
Early Education and Care Services.....	16
Council Policies	17

Womin Jeka

Port Phillip Council recognises the rich Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage within this municipality and respectfully acknowledges the Yalukut Weelam Clan of the Boon Wurrung. We pay our respects to their elders both past and present.

The Yalukut Weelam clan of the Boon Wurrung are the first people of the City of Port Phillip, with a continued strong connection to the land. Yalukut Weelam means 'river home' or 'people of the river', reflecting the original prevalence of the wetlands between the Yarra River and the foreshore.

We acknowledge and uphold their continuing relationship to this land. We also acknowledge the importance of the healthy development for our youngest residents, our Bubups, for they are the future of our municipality.

Definitions

Definitions of key terms used in this document in relation to Children’s Services in Port Phillip:

Term	Definition
Childcare	<p>A centre-based, long day early education and care service for children aged birth to six who attend on a regular basis (does not include family day care or occasional care).</p> <p>Childcare services are eligible for the Federal Government Childcare Subsidy. In general, long day early education and care services provide kindergarten programs.</p>
Children’s Services	<p>Services that provide education, learning and development experiences from birth to the commencement of primary school years:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • childcare • kindergarten • play groups • toy libraries.
Contemporary facility	<p>In relation to a facility or environment, this means a facility or environment that meets or exceeds the National Quality Framework, Standard for Quality Area 3 - Physical Environment and enables the delivery of a contemporary service.</p>
Early Years Services	<p>Services that support young children and their families and carers in the early years of life from birth to age 8 including, maternal and child health, family support, allied health and children’s services.</p>
Kindergarten	<p>A stand-alone early years education and care program for children in the two years before they start school (generally for children aged 3-6 years old) that provides sessional or extended hours programs under the direction of a qualified kindergarten teacher.</p>
Playgroup	<p>An informal community led session where parents, carers and young children come together to learn and develop through informal play and social interaction.</p>
Social benefits	<p>Benefits for children and families, e.g. increasing children’s competence, children developing stable relationships in adulthood.</p> <p>Benefits for the community, e.g. reducing intergenerational disadvantage, increasing employment participation.</p>
Supported Playgroup	<p>A targeted facilitator led service (funded by the Department of Health and Human Services) that aims to improve the learning, development, and wellbeing outcomes of children from birth until they start primary school.</p> <p>Supported playgroups are required to deliver <i>smalltalk</i> to all participating families. <i>smalltalk</i> is a set of evidence based strategies that</p>

Term	Definition
	introduce parents to a small number of parenting essentials that lead to optimal child outcomes. ¹
The Childcare Package	Federal Government funding towards the cost of registered childcare. The package includes the Child Care subsidy, and the Childcare Safety Net (for eligible families) which includes the Additional Childcare Subsidy.
Toy library	A community-managed service that provides member families borrower access to a range of toys, games, puzzles and activities that support children’s development through supporting play and imagination.
Vulnerable	<p>This policy considers a child or young person to be vulnerable when they are exposed to a range of known risk factors that increase the likelihood they will experience poor outcomes in relation to their wellbeing and safety.²</p> <p>These risk factors include (but are not limited to) family violence, alcohol and substance abuse, mental health problems, abuse, neglect, unstable housing and situational stress.</p>

Purpose

This policy describes Council’s role in children’s services and what we will do to support the wellbeing and development of children and families in our community. The City of Port Phillip has developed the Children’s Services Policy to guide how we support, deliver and invest in children’s services.

Outcomes

Council has a vision for Children’s Services:

‘A children’s services environment that honours diversity, builds creativity and social connections and encourages all children and families to maximise their development outcomes now and in the future.’

The Children’s Services policy is seeking to achieve three outcomes:

1. All children living in Port Phillip are supported to develop their full potential.
2. Parents, carers and families are supported to increase their capacity and capability.
3. The effects of disadvantage on children’s development are minimised.

¹ Source < <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/services-for-parents/Pages/supported-playgroups.aspx>> Accessed 26 June 2019

² Source *Report of the Protecting Victoria’s Vulnerable Children Inquiry*: Volume 2, January 2012 Victorian Government p31 ,< <http://childprotectioninquiry.vic.gov.au/report-pvvc-inquiry.html>> Accessed 26 June 2019

Commitment to Child Safety

The City of Port Phillip has zero tolerance for child abuse.

The City of Port Phillip is a committed Child Safe organisation. Our commitment is to ensure that a culture of child safety is embedded into our practices and processes.

Every child accessing City of Port Phillip has the right to feel and be safe.

This City embraces diversity and inclusion. All children, regardless of their gender, race, religious beliefs, age, disability, sexual orientation, family background and social background, have equal rights to protection from abuse.

We firmly commit to the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to the provision of a safe environment for children with a disability, as well as other vulnerable groups of children.

All City of Port Phillip Councillors, employees, volunteers, contractors and community representatives have a responsibility to understand and activate their role in preventing, detecting, responding and reporting any suspicions of child abuse to the relevant authorities, and maintaining a child safe culture.

Background

The City of Port Phillip has a proud history of recognising and supporting the importance of providing quality and accessible early year's services and the important contribution of all children.

Children's services operate in a complex and highly regulated environment. Federal, state and local government all have important roles in the regulation, funding and delivery of children's services. Over the last ten years, both the Commonwealth and Victorian government have increased their investment in early childhood services and there have been a range of legislative changes designed to improve quality and accessibility of early education and care services.

The Commonwealth government sets quality standards for early education providers, sets priority of access guidelines and provides subsidies to support families to access early education and care services.

The Victorian government has a responsibility for state-wide policy and the provision of funding, planning and regulation of early years' services. It regulates the National Quality Standards set by the Commonwealth and provides funding to support universal access to four-year old kindergarten.

It also provides infrastructure grants to early education facilities (both long-day care and sessional). Over the next five years the Victorian Government will introduce universal access to three-year old kindergarten and funding to increase capacity in the sector.

Local government has a statutory and social responsibility to plan for its local community. It supports the learning, health and wellbeing of Victorian children and families through determining policy at a local level. In line with the Early Years Compact, the City of Port Phillip 'takes a place-based approach to planning, funding and infrastructure investment, as well as the coordination and delivery of services for children and families.'³

The City of Port Phillip recognises that:

- the first 1000 days (from conception, throughout pregnancy, and in the first two years of life) are a crucial stage in every child's life
- all children and families can benefit from accessing children's services
- children in vulnerable circumstances have the most to gain from participating in children's services but are often the least likely to attend
- investing in early years is cost-effective and moderates the impact of social disadvantage in early childhood, promoting health and wellbeing in adolescence and adulthood and reducing later demand for services.
- Council has a role in supporting children's services to be accessible to all children in Port Phillip
- parents, families and care-givers have a crucial role in children's well-being and development and should be supported to engage in services and seek additional support when required.

The development of this policy has been informed by significant engagement with children, families, service providers and other stakeholders.

Scope

The Children's Services Policy describes:

- what Council will do to support children's services to be accessible and how Council's actions co-ordinate with State and Federal government policies and programs
- Council's role in the delivery of children's services
- how children's services will work with Early Years Services such as Maternal Child Health Services, Family Support Services and Allied Health Services to support children to reach their full potential

The Children's Services Policy applies to:

- children aged 0 - 6 and their families and caregivers living in the City of Port Phillip
- children's services that are delivered in the City of Port Phillip
- children's services that receive financial or in-kind support from City of Port Phillip
- Council facilitated processes that support the delivery of Children's Services.

³ The Early Years Compact, *Supporting children and families in the Early Years: A Compact between the Department of Education and Training, Department of Health and Human Services and Local Government* (represented by the Municipal Association of Victoria) 2017-2027, page 5

Policy Objectives

The Children's Services Policy has seven objectives that describe Council's priorities for ensuring the vision for children's services is achieved.

Objective 1

Council will work with partners to ensure that every child, regardless of their abilities or background, will have access to affordable, safe, accessible, quality Early Years' services to support development to their full potential.

Objective 2

Council will understand current and future needs of families in the city and influence the provision of early years services to meet those needs.

Objective 3

Early years' services will be financially sustainable and consistently aligned with relevant policies and legislation at the local, state and federal level.

Objective 4

Council will encourage collaboration across all early years' services.

Objective 5

Families will have access to the services and information they need, at the times they need it, to make choices appropriate for their needs.

Objective 6

Early years services will be supported by safe, accessible, contemporary, fit-for-purpose, sustainable facilities and environments.

Objective 7

Children will have access to natural environments that allow them to learn about and experience play in nature. This includes natural environments within early years' services.

Policy Commitments

To achieve these policy objectives Council will:

1. Ensure assertive outreach services to support children experiencing vulnerability to access childcare, kindergarten, toy libraries and playgroups. This includes identifying and reducing barriers such as navigating the system and accessing available subsidies.
2. Reduce financial barriers preventing low income and vulnerable families from accessing childcare, kindergarten, toy libraries and playgroups through targeted grants.
3. Help families to access additional support when they need it and build capability in children's services to support families experiencing vulnerable circumstances.
4. Advocate to other levels of government to increase investment and ensure all children have access to high quality and accessible children's services.
5. Work with families and all providers to improve enrolment processes to enable access to childcare and kindergarten for all children in Port Phillip.
6. Monitor and model current and future changes in community needs, government policy, available funding and service availability to ensure adequate provision of quality children's services in Port Phillip.
7. Support a thriving early education and care sector in Port Phillip that provides quality service options enabling choice and accessibility for all children and families. This includes:
 - a. Operating childcare services where there is a business case that Council-run compared with community-run is the most effective way to ensure quality and accessibility for children in Port Phillip and encourage a thriving early education and care sector.
 - b. Providing equitable and transparent funding agreements and/or tenancy arrangements to support quality and viable community organisations that provide childcare and kindergarten services.
 - c. Providing co-ordination services for toy libraries to support collaboration and facilitate access for all families. This includes working with toy library committees of management to develop and implement an operating model that meets the current and future needs of families in Port Phillip.
 - d. Providing supported playgroups and improving access for all children and families to community-led playgroups in partnership with service managers, facility managers and playgroup coordinators.
8. Support the implementation of Child Safe Standards across all children's services through education and capacity building programs.
9. Support networks for all children's service providers to work together, and to access funding, training and nature play opportunities.
10. Foster resource sharing and collaboration between playgroups and between toy libraries.
11. Provide current and accessible information about children's services available in Port Phillip. Provide links to external sources of information where appropriate.
12. Provide opportunities for families with children to connect and build relationships through playgroups, parenting information sessions and promoting family-friendly council and community events.

13. Implement a long-term strategy in consultation with service providers to ensure facilities can meet current and future demand for children's services in Port Phillip. This strategy will ensure:
 - Council provides facilities where there is evidence of a community need that can't be met in any other way.
 - Council-owned facilities are fit for purpose and meet legislative and building compliance requirements.
 - All appropriate funding opportunities for upgrades or redevelopment of children's services facilities are pursued
 - Opportunities for integrated service delivery are leveraged, where appropriate.
 - Facilities provide access to natural environments and nature play.
14. Support the development and accessibility of natural environments in public spaces where children, families and children's services can engage in nature play and activities that support children's development.
15. Work with service providers to facilitate the promotion of:
 - outdoor learning environments
 - programs that promote children's connection to nature and environmental sustainability practices.
16. Support opportunities for nature play, both formal and informal, in children's services.

Monitoring Effectiveness

We will measure success by measuring both early indicators of success and outcomes for children and families. The operational effectiveness of the policy will be monitored through the life of the policy.

The findings of evaluation activities will drive improvements. These activities will include both outcome measures, particularly outcomes for children, and process measures such as satisfaction.

Evaluations will review data, including data on service performance and use, and will engage with families, carers and children who use services, and with families who experience challenges in using services.

Evaluations will be used to understand how children's services are supporting the development and wellbeing of children and families in Port Phillip.

Examples of key indicators and data sources that will be used are provided below.

Early indicators of success

Key Indicators	Data Source
Families' use of children's services	Data on the numbers of children accessing children's services
Children in vulnerable circumstances' use of Children's Services	Data on the numbers of children accessing in vulnerable circumstances

Outcomes for children and families

Key Indicators	Data Source
All children living in Port Phillip are supported to develop to their full potential	Maternal Child Health 3.5-year-old visit data Australian Early Developmental Census (AEDC) data
Parents and families increase capacity / capability	Supported playgroup participant questionnaires Data on duration of access for children's services Data on parent transition to work or study
Effects of disadvantage on children's development are minimised	Maternal Child Health 3.5-year-old visit data Australian Early Developmental Census (AEDC) data Early Years Compact data

Longer-term impacts for children and families

Key Indicators	Data Source
<p>Children maximise their health and wellbeing</p> <p>Children and families are connected to community</p> <p>Children grow and develop to be healthy and well adults</p>	<p>Growing Up in Australia – the Longitudinal study of Australian Children</p>
<p>Children have improved educational attainment and become lifelong learners</p>	<p>Data on educational attainment and post school, e.g. Department of Education and Training ‘On Track’ Survey</p>
<p>Vulnerable families have increased capacity</p> <p>Reduction in intergenerational vulnerability</p>	<p>Council and community agency data on service utilisation</p> <p>Growing Up in Australia – the Longitudinal study of Australian Children</p>

Policy Limitations

The Children's Services Policy must be consistent with the objectives and the specific requirements of state and federal policies for children's services.

Policy Review

The policy review will be undertaken at least every five years. A change to relevant policy, legislation or regulations may also trigger a review of this policy.

Relevant Policy, Regulations and Legislation

Human Rights

Title	Relevance
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)	A legally-binding international agreement that sets out children's rights and how governments should work together to make them available to all children. All levels of government in Australia work together to make these rights available to all children.
Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities	<p>Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (the Charter) is a Victorian law that sets out the basic rights, freedoms and responsibilities of all people in Victoria.</p> <p>The Charter requires public authorities, including local government, to act consistently with the human rights in the Charter.</p>
Equal Opportunity Act 2010	The Equal Opportunity Act 2010 provides protections from discrimination in public life in Victoria. When accessing Children's Services, this includes protection, from discrimination when on the basis of disability, gender identity, race (including colour, nationality, ethnicity and ethnic origin), religious belief or activity or sexual orientation.
Disability Discrimination Act 1992	The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person, in many areas of public life, including getting or using services because of their disability. This includes getting and using Children's Services.

Government Delivery of Goods and Services

Title	Relevance
Local Government Act 1989	Provides a framework for the establishment and operation of councils.
Competition and Consumer Act 2010	A national law that seeks to enhance the welfare of Australians by promoting fair trading and competition (including where both Government and non-government providers deliver services in the same market), and through the provision of consumer protections.
National Competition Policy	Legislation to ensure that government businesses compete fairly in the market.

Early Education and Care Services

Title	Relevance
Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010	Legislation (the National Law) to set a national standard for children's education and care across Australia
Education and Care National Regulations	Regulations to support the National Law by providing detail on a range of operational requirements for an education and care service, including the National Quality Standards
Children's Services Act 1996	Victorian legislation that provides for the licensing and regulation of children's services.
Children's Services Regulations 2009	Victorian regulations regarding licensing and operation of children's services
Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005	Victorian legislation that provides an overarching legislative framework designed to encourage and support a shared commitment towards children in Victoria
Children, Youth and Families Act 2005	Builds on the foundations of the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 to provide guidance on additional considerations in promoting positive outcomes for children who are vulnerable as a result of their family circumstances.
Early Years Compact, Supporting Children and families in the Early Years:	A Compact between the Department of Education and Training, Department of Health and Human Services and Local Government (represented by the Municipal Association of Victoria) 2017-2027, to integrate planning, coordination and information sharing across the early years sector in Victoria
National Quality Framework - Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority	A national system for the regulation and quality assessment of education and care services. It applies to most long day care, preschool/kindergarten, family day care and outside school hours care services.

Council Policies

Title	Relevance
City of Port Phillip Property Policy	Provides a ‘whole-of-Council’ framework for the management of property assets and sets out a framework and guiding principles for the alignment of the Council’s property portfolio with its service delivery objectives
City of Port Phillip Community Funding Policy	The Community Funding Policy provides the guiding principles and accompanying framework for the delivery of grants subsidies, donations and funding agreements in the City of Port Phillip to community organisations and individuals, including community managed children’s services.