

## Supporting early childhood development for Koorie children living away from their parents

An early start, and more time at kindergarten prepares children for success at school and has a positive impact later in life.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (the Department) works in close partnership with the Department of Human Services, local government, early childhood education and care services to support young children in foster or kinship care.

The key focus of the partnership is to increase the participation of young children in care in maternal, child health and kindergarten services.



### Early childhood services

The Department provides a range of Koorie specific and universal services to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (referred to as Koorie children in this fact sheet) and their carers.

These services promote cultural identity and links with the local Koorie community, and are there to support each child so that they have the best opportunity to succeed with their language, development and self-confidence.

### Koorie children's services

Services are available across Victoria to meet the specific cultural, learning and development needs of Koorie children:

- **Aboriginal Best Start**

A number of Aboriginal Best Start projects have been established across Victoria to enable better access to culturally relevant child and family support, health services and early education and care.

- **Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Centres**

Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) are designed to meet the educational, social and developmental needs of Aboriginal children. The services provide long day care services and at least one other form of child care or activity, such as outside school hours care, play groups, nutrition programs and/or parenting programs to the community.

- **Aboriginal Child and Family Centres**

Victoria has two Aboriginal Child and Family Centres, in the City of Whittlesea and in Bairnsdale, East Gippsland.

The centres provide early childhood and family support services, including long day care, kindergarten for three and four-year-old Aboriginal children, visiting maternal and child health nurses, counsellors, midwives and other programs.

- **In Home Support and Home Based Learning Programs**

In Home Support and Home Based Learning programs assist Aboriginal families to strengthen their parenting capacity and improve the health, development, learning and wellbeing of Aboriginal children aged 0-5 years.

- **Supported Parent and Playgroup Initiative (SPPI) groups**

SPPI groups aim to provide quality play opportunities for children to foster language development, motor skills, expose children to sensory experiences and enhance social skills.



## Universal children's services

Across Victoria a number of universal services are available to support all children and young people.

- **Maternal and Child Health**

The Maternal and Child Health service provides advice on the health and development of children and can refer the child in your care to additional services if needed.

Contact your local council or case manager to register the child in your care for Maternal and Child Health key ages and stages visits. If the child is under 12 months old they should be referred to the Enhanced Maternal and Child Health service.

- **Kindergarten**

The Department funds over 2000 kindergarten programs across Victoria. These programs are available for all four year old children.

### Both three and four year old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are able to access 15 hours a week of free kindergarten.

Three year old children have access to the Early Start Kindergarten program and four year old children can access the kindergarten fee subsidy or early start kindergarten extension grant. This is available in all kindergartens and long day care centres where a kindergarten program is delivered by a qualified teacher.

Children in your care are eligible to access a free kindergarten program if they are at least three years old by 30<sup>th</sup> April in the year that they are attending kindergarten.

Children's services at your local council, the Department's Koorie Engagement Support Officers or your case manager can assist you to enrol children in your care in kindergarten. It is best to enrol as early as possible to make sure the child gets a place at your preferred kindergarten, as unlike schools the child's place is not guaranteed.

### Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out-of-Home Care

The Agreement is a partnership between the Department of Human Services, local government, early childhood education and care services and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The aim of the Agreement is to ensure children in foster care or kinship care have access to appropriate local services,

especially kindergarten and maternal and child health services. Carers and case managers can use this commitment to ensure prioritized access for Koorie children. Contacts have been established in each local government area to support to case managers with the implementation of the agreement.

## Key contact

- **Koorie Engagement Support Officers**

Koorie Engagement Support Officers (KESOs) are employed by the Department across Victoria. KESOs are best placed to support you to access services and link you with the local Koorie community to assist you to support children in your care.

To get in touch with your local KESO contact your regional office on the numbers provided below.

Region	Location	Switchboard
North-Eastern Victoria	Benalla	03 8392 9500
	Glen Waverley	03 8392 9300
North-Western Victoria	Bendigo	03 5440 3111
	Coburg	03 9488 9488
South-Eastern Victoria	Dandenong	03 8765 5600
	Moe	03 5127 0400
South-Western Victoria	Ballarat	03 5337 8444
	Geelong	03 5225 1000
	Footscray	03 8397 0300

- **Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated**

The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association (VAEAI) Incorporated is the peak Koorie community organisation for education and training in Victoria.

VAEAI provides a platform for community to have a voice in the way policies are shaped for the delivery of Koorie children's services and early childhood services.

**If you would like more information about education for Koorie children, contact VAEAI on 9481 0800 or [www.vaeai.org.au](http://www.vaeai.org.au)**

