

Information for foster kinship carers

Helping with the cost of early childhood education

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Early Childhood Education and Care

Attending a quality early childhood program helps set children up for later success at school. Through play-based programs, young children develop their creativity and imagination, social and communication skills, develop self-confidence and make new friends.

We acknowledge the high cost of child care and that the fortnightly caring allowance doesn't cover these costs.

To ensure children in out-of-home care have the same early childhood educational opportunities as other children, we're providing financial assistance to carers to help meet the cost of early childhood education and care. This payment is in addition to support payments we provide to meet child related costs.

What financial support is available?

Australian Government

The Australian Government offers the **Child Care Benefit (CCB)** and **Child Care Rebate (CCR)** for

children attending approved child care services (and registered child care).

The CCB is an income tested payment from the Australian Government to help families with the cost of various child care services. The amount of the CCB paid depends on your income, how often the child attends care, the number of children in child care as well as the application of the 'work, training and study' test.

All eligible families can receive the CCB for up to 24 hours of care per week, or up to 50 hours per week if you or your partner are the child's grandparent, or you are working, training or studying for at least 15 hours per week or 30 hours per fortnight.

Eligibility criteria for the CCB includes:

- attending an approved or registered child care
- immunisation requirements
- income test
- residency rules

You'll need to register with Centrelink (if you are not already registered) and lodge an application for the CCB.

When completing the CCB form, we recommend you select fortnightly payments to be made directly to the child care service as a fee reduction — not as a direct payment to your bank account. It is also important for you to select that an organisation does not have liability for the child care fees. You are liable for the CCB portion of the child care fees, the department cannot be liable for CCB and CCR.

For information about how to claim the CCB, go to the Department of Human Services website <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/> and search for 'claiming child care benefit'.

The CCR provides additional assistance for families. It covers up to 50% of out-of-pocket expenses up to a maximum cap per child per year.

The CCR is not means tested, however you can only be paid if you're eligible for the CCB. Even if the CCB payment is \$0, you can still be eligible to receive CCR. There is no need to claim for CCR as it is determined from the CCB claim.

As with CCB, we recommend you select CCR payments to be made directly to the child care service as a fee reduction.

To find out how much you could receive from the CCB and CCR, go to the Department of Human Services website <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/> and search for 'online estimators'.

You may also be eligible for the **Grandparent Child Care Benefit** if you are caring for a grandchild, receive an income support payment and meet CCB eligibility requirements.

Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services

The costs charged by child care services varies and is often higher than the CCB and CCR payments.

To help meet these gap costs, we're providing financial assistance of \$40 per week or \$2000 per year for each child attending an approved child care service. If the amount payable is less than \$40 per week, the department will pay the full amount.

To be eligible for the 'early childhood education and care participation minimum gap payment', the child needs to be:

- aged 1–5 years old
- subject to an interim or final child protection order granting custody or guardianship to the chief executive
- reside with an approved carer in family based care, and
- attend an approved child care service, specifically a long day care or limited-hours care service, or a kindergarten.

This gap payment is in addition to financial assistance provided by the Australian Government or by the department through Child Related Costs.

Pre-approval is not required from your child safety service manager as this is **not a discretionary payment**. Entitlement is automatic providing the eligibility criteria is met. You'll still need to provide documentation to the child safety care service to receive the gap payment. The invoice from the child care service will usually display the full fee charged, the CCB and CCR deductions and the final amount owing.

We can make the gap payment either directly to the child care service, or as reimbursement if you've already paid the invoice.

Why is the selection of a child care service important?

Although there are a range of early childhood education and care services available for children, the selection of a service is particularly important, as this will effect whether or not you may be eligible to access financial assistance to meet the costs of child care. For example, the Australian government payments of Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate are only available through approved child care services (and registered child care) because they meet certain standards and requirements. To find an approved child care service in your area, go to the **mychild** website www.mychild.gov.au

To be eligible for this policy, the child needs to be attending an approved child care service, specifically a long day care or limited-hours care service, or a kindergarten.

If you currently have a child in your care who meets the eligibility criteria, talk to your child safety officer about the early childhood education and care gap payment.