

RURAL CARE ENROLMENT AND FEE PAYMENT POLICY

This policy is applicable to: DECD employees and families
and
is to be signed by the parent /guardian as part of a child's enrolment process.

AGREEMENT

I acknowledge that I have read and agree
(Parent / Guardian)
to the terms of the DECD Rural Care Enrolment and Fee Payment Policy.

Signed Date: / /
(Parent / Guardian)

DOCUMENT CONTROL

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CONTENTS

1. TITLE	3
2. POLICY STATEMENT	3
3. PURPOSE	3
4. SCOPE	3
5. OBJECTIVE	3
6. POLICY DETAILS	4
6.1 Enrolments	4
6.2 Offers of Care	4
6.3 Change / Cancellation of Booked Care	5
6.4 Rural Care Bond	5
6.5 Rural Care Fees	5
6.6 Invoices	5
6.7 Payment Due Date	5
6.8 Payment Methods	5
6.9 Overdue Fees	5
6.10 Debt Collection	6
7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES	6
8. MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REVIEW	7
9. DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS	7
10. REFERENCES	7

REVISION RECORD

Date	Version	Revision description
Sept 2012	1	DRAFT for consultation with rural care sites
Nov 2012	2	Final draft for approval
Dec 2012	3	Approved

1. TITLE

Rural Care Enrolment and Fee Payment Policy

2. POLICY STATEMENT

The Rural Care program is jointly funded by the South Australian and Australian Governments and administered by the Department for Education and Child Development (DECD). The program provides the opportunity for small centre based child care programs to be delivered in rural communities that are not able to sustain viable, centre-based child care options.

Child care fees are set by DECD and take into account requirements of the Education and Care Services National Regulations, Australian Tax Office, Privacy Act and the guidelines contained within the Australian Government Child Care Service Handbook.

A clearly explained enrolment and fee payment process aims to ensure that families are provided with fee payment requirements.

DECD believes that payment issues should not impact negatively on the relationships between educators, children and families. Up-to-date payments will ensure that a quality child care service is able to be sustained in each of the communities in which it is delivered. To remain viable, each service that is part of the program is expected to maintain a financially viable utilisation of booked care.

3. PURPOSE

To provide families, the Rural Care program site leader (Preschool Director/ School Principal), educators and the governing council with clear direction on the enrolment practices to be followed and the payment and collection of rural child care fees.

4. SCOPE

This policy is applicable to DECD Rural Care programs and families

5. OBJECTIVE

To ensure DECD Rural Care programs

- have guidelines in relation to the enrolment of child care and requirements for fee payments
- are able to collect child care fees in order to maintain quality child care programs and meet budgetary targets
- are able to provide a cost neutral care program and meet the requirements of the Australian Government in relation to the provision of child care programs.

6. Administrative Guidelines

6.1 Enrolments

To book care a parent / guardian is required to complete an enrolment form indicating which sessions and days care is required. Families can seek ongoing care as a permanent enrolment or alternatively care can be provided on a casual basis if places are available.

Enrolment forms are available from the Rural Care program.

Prior to enrolment, the fee payment process and child care government assistance options are to be discussed with the site leader.

Families wishing to access Australian Government assistance with child care fees should contact the Australian Human Services Department, Centrelink (DHS) for an assessment of eligibility.

<http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/subjects/assistance-with-child-care-fees>

Where possible advice regarding eligibility assistance should be sought prior to an enrolment being submitted.

The *Rural Care Enrolment and Fee Payment Policy* is to be signed by a parent /guardian to acknowledge fee payment responsibility, and be lodged together with the *Rural Care Enrolment Form*.

6.2 Offers of Care

Rural Care programs need to comply with Australian Government criteria when offering care placements. The criteria that are set by the Australian Government are outlined in the Child Care Service Handbook.

Reference:

As at September 2012 this criteria specifies:

There are three levels of priority, which child care services must follow when filling vacant places:

- *Priority 1: a child at risk of serious abuse or neglect*
- *Priority 2: a child of a single parent who satisfies, or of parents who both satisfy, the work, training, study test under section 14 of the A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999*
- *Priority 3: any other child .i.e. respite care*

Within these main categories, priority should also be given to the following children:

- *children in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families*
- *children in families which include a disabled person*
- *children in families which include an individual whose adjusted taxable income does not exceed the lower income threshold (see inside back cover) or who or whose partner are on income support*
- *children in families with a non-English speaking background*
- *children in socially isolated families*
- *children of single parents.*

There are some circumstances in which a child who is already in a child care service may be required to change their booked time or leave the service.

When a service has no vacant places and is providing child care for a child who is a Priority 3 under the Priority of Access Guidelines, the service may require that child to leave the child care service in order for the service to provide a place for a higher priority child, but only if:

- *the person who is liable to pay child care fees in respect of the child was notified when the child first occupied the child care place that the service followed this policy*
- *the service gives that person at least 14 days' notice of the requirement for the child to leave the child care service.*

6.3 Change / Cancellation of Booked Care

Written notice of 14 days is required from a parent / guardian to change or cancel booked care.

6.4 Rural Care Bond

A bond payment equivalent to **one week's full fee** of booked care is required to be paid prior to the provision of regular care commencing. The site leader will provide you with a *Rural Care Bond Payment Request* on enrolment confirmation. If full payment is not achievable prior to care commencing, a family may apply to the site leader to enter into a signed *Rural Care Negotiated Outstanding Bond Payment Plan* to pay the bond in instalments, together with the ongoing weekly charge.

The bond payment is not eligible to attract Australian Government Child Care assistance.

The bond monies will be returned on completion of care services being provided and after all fee payments are made.

Note: The bond payment may be used to finalise an outstanding balance for care provided.

6.5 Rural Care Fees

All DECD Rural Care programs will apply the standard program fee schedule. The schedule will be provided to families and displayed in a prominent position at the site.

The program will aim to minimise fee increases on families. However DECD will adjust the fees on an annual basis to balance the program budget and ensure sustainability. At least one month's notice will be provided to families when changes to the fee schedule are to occur.

6.6 Invoices

Families will receive their first tax invoice in the week following commencement of care. An invoice will include an opening balance, fees charged, less Child Care Benefit (CCB) / Child Care Rebate (CCR), i.e. Australian Government subsidies, payments received and a closing balance. Bond charges and payments will also be included.

The tax invoice will also include a statement of child attendance for the period of care charged and the accrued number of child absences for the financial year.

Invoices will be emailed where an email address is provided or posted to a mailing address.

6.7 Payment Due Date

Payments for care provided are due and payable on receipt of invoice.

If families prefer, they may apply to the site leader to enter into a signed *Rural Care Payment Plan* to make regular payments or at specified times as agreed with the site leader.

6.8 Payment Methods

Families are encouraged to pay using electronic funds transfer where possible.

Banking details will be provided to families by the Rural Care site leader.

Alternatively payment by cash or cheque will be accepted and a receipt issued.

6.9 Overdue Fees

In the short term if a family is unable to meet fee payments they may apply to the site leader to enter into a signed *Rural Care Negotiated Outstanding Payment Plan*. This plan

will focus on clearing the outstanding debt, together with meeting payment for ongoing care and therefore allow care to continue to be provided.

If a family is in need of additional assistance to meet fee payments, they are encouraged to speak with the site leader in relation to accessing Special Child Care Benefit (SCB), i.e. Australian Government subsidy. Refer:

[Claim for Special Child Care Benefit and/or increased weekly limit of hours form \(FA023\)](#)

6.10 Debt Collection

If payments fall behind and / or negotiated arrangements made for late payment are not met, provision of care will be ceased. Further care cannot recommence until all outstanding payments are made.

Where fees remain outstanding without an appropriate arrangement, the DECD FDC Business and Customer Support Centre (DECD BC&SC) will issue a First and Final Notice requesting immediate payment within 7 days.

If payment is not received within 7 days, the outstanding debt will be referred for debt collection.

7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Party / Parties	Roles and responsibilities
Site Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comply with the obligations and requirements set out in the National Law and all relevant government policies • Comply with obligations and requirements of the Australian Government • Comply with the requirements of this procedure and any related DECD policy/procedure/guidelines • Ensure appropriate communication is maintained with the Regional Director and Program Leader • Seek advice or assistance when required.
A/Director Early Childhood Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve this procedure and its contents • Ensure that this procedure is monitored, evaluated and reviewed every 2 years or as required • Ensure advice sought on this procedure is responded to in a timely manner.
Manager Preschool and Centre Based Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor, evaluate and review this procedure every 2 years or as required • Ensure that this procedure and its contents are compliant and up to date with relevant legislative and state government obligations • Advise on this procedure and its practical application to DECD employees.

8. MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REVIEW

This procedure will be reviewed in 2 years or earlier if required.

Review of this procedure will include the Rural Care Program Leader, Preschool and Centre Based Care considering any amendments or updates of the documents listed below as Associated Documents and References and any other future relevant DECD policy/procedure/guidelines including HR policies.

9. DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Term	Meaning
DECD Rural Care program	A DECD Rural Care program is a child care program provided in a preschool, kindergarten, children's services centre or a school based preschool service
Site Leader	Preschool Director / School Principal
DECD FDC Business and Customer Support Centre (DECD BC&SC)	Provides a billing and account processing service for the Rural Care Program.
Human Services Department (DHS)	Australian Government Office which provides information on child care assistance.
Casual Care	Care provided as able on an as needs basis where positions are available

10. REFERENCES

- 10.1 Child Care Assistance - Human Services Department
www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/subjects/assistance-with-child-care-fees