A Parent’s Guide to Sourcing Child Care in Australia

Brief Guide to the Guide (Disclaimer)

The intention of this guide is to provide advice to new and aspiring parents as to where they can find information on what the types of child care facilities are available in Australia, where they can find them and how they can claim any available government rebates/subsidies. The purpose of the guide is not to provide a list of preferred child care facilities but to enable you to find one that is most suitable for you and your children. The final decision of where to send your children when you return to work is a very personal one that will require time and consideration on your part, hopefully this guide will help to streamline that process.

The take-home message from the guide it is that – No source of information that you find online is as good as going to the child care facility and seeing it and meeting the staff for yourselves. This would usually be part of the sourcing process before making a final decision on which child care facility to send your child to. Traditional day care facilities will often allow some induction period, where you and your child can attend the centre prior to formal enrolment to see how they/you like it, before you commit to firmly securing a place.

NOTE: You will need to be on a waiting list to access many child care providers so plan your child care as far in advance as you can. Wait lists can be over a year long and so you may need to put your child on a wait list before they are born. High intake is often in January/February.

The guide has been written based on the author’s personal experiences in organising child care for their children. As such, your experience may differ and the Monash Parkville EMCR committee encourages you to contact their child care representative (Andrew Clulow at the time of writing) at any time if you feel that there is useful information that could be added to the guide or if the information in the guide is no longer valid due to changes in websites/procedures. It is the intention of the committee that the guide evolves with the changing landscape of child care, both externally and on-campus. Your input is crucial to that process so please do not hesitate to get in touch. It is important to note that the information herein is true to the best of the author’s knowledge at the time of writing, the views expressed herein are those of the author and are not those of Monash University or its affiliated faculties.

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1. What kinds of Child Care are Available?

Before embarking on a search for child care, it is worth getting to know what types of child care are available to you, as not all providers are the same and you may be asked to specify a type of child care in online search engines.

In general, the options available to you will be:

- Centre-based care (long day care, kindergarten, preschool) – based in a child care centre with trained staff and with a structured learning program;
- Family day care – a small group of children cared for in the home of an approved carer;
- Home-based day care – an approved carer looks after your child in your home (in this case you source the carer, not a location);
- Occasional care – short-term care on a casual basis, typically based in a centre; and,
- Outside School Hours Care – care for primary school-aged children before/after normal school hours or during school holidays/inset (student-free) days.

More detailed information on these types of child care is summarised on the following websites:

- MyChild  
  (www.mychild.gov.au/childcare-information/options)
- Care for Kids  
- Raising Children  
  (http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/what_type_of_child_care_is_best_for_me.html)

This list has been limited to websites with national outlook, some state/territory and local governments also supply information on child care options online.
2. Where to Find Child Care?

This section of the guide provides a selection of websites that can be used to locate child care facilities with some screenshots showing their utility. The websites all have slightly different focuses and are listed in no particular order.

MyChild (www.mychild.gov.au)

This is the current central government repository of information on child care, including where to find facilities and what government support you can get towards child care costs. The “Find child care” tab (highlighted below) can be used to search for child care by location and type (or name if you have been recommended a centre).

Searching by suburb with a postcode provides a fairly narrow field of view compared to some of the other websites, but it does supply an interactive map with a list of the available facilities.
The search can be modified in the left-hand column and selecting individual centres either on the map or in the table gives more information on them, in this example the CSL centre labelled “E”.

The website initially provides information on the types of care provided, hours of operation, contact details and service location. The tabs in the lower box outline the fees, vacancies, local educational program information and the quality of the centre.

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The Australian Government provides financial assistance to reduce the cost of child care for families. To view an indication of general out of pocket costs, select a full day fee from the options below. For a more personalised estimate, you can visit the Child Care Estimator.

For the most accurate assessment of your entitlements, please contact the Department of Human Services.
Daily fees are listed based on age and the last updated date is shown, best to treat this as an indication and contact the centre for more information, typically these are correct to within 10%. A link is also given to the government websites with information on financial assistance provided by the government to help you estimate your out-of-pocket costs.

The vacancies section of this particular website almost exclusively says that there are vacancies every day of the week for all age groups, which is almost certainly not the case for most centres and particularly those in high population density areas or those close to urban centres. **Best to ignore this section and to contact the child care centre directly for information on availability of places.**

Centres are ranked against a National Quality Framework and the rankings are undertaken by the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). A bullet-point assessment of whether centres are “working towards”, “meeting” or “exceeding” the seven key national quality
standards is given under the quality tab. The National Quality Standards were revised in February 2018 and a more thorough description of each standard can be found at www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard. It should be noted that centres assessed prior to February 2018 will have been assessed against the old standards and will be awaiting reassessment. The assessment date can be found through other searching websites as discussed on pages 8-9.

**Care for Kids (www.careforkids.com.au)**

Careforkids.com.au is another website that provides suburb-based searching for child care options from its homepage shown above.

Searches again provide an interactive map showing the location of child care facilities of the type selected (in this case all facilities). Green ticks above location markers suggest vacancies are available and red crosses indicate vacancies may not be available. **Again, it is best to take this information**
as an indicator only and contact the centre to ascertain the true number of vacancies. The panel on the right gives an average child care cost for the suburb, which is usually accurate to within 10%. Selecting a particular centre on the interactive map provides the centre’s information and has drop-down menus to access fees, vacancies and ratings against the National Quality Standards. Clicking on the centre name takes you to a detailed page that contains all of this information at a glance.

This website often shows a mixture of vacancies and no vacancies but it is best to contact the child care centre directly to confirm the number of vacancies. Vacancies are listed by age and day.
Fee information is given as a daily charge and the rating against the National Quality Standard is summarised as a single average across all of the standards. If you click on the “more” link after the NQS rating you will be redirected to the ACECQA website, where you can find the full details of the centre’s last assessment including the assessment date.

Click on the centre name to view the details of their last ACECQA assessment.

The initial part of the assessment contains the centre’s details. Scroll down to get to the rankings against the national quality standards.
This section provides the assessment results and date, so that you know whether the centre was ranked against the old or the new standards introduced in February 2018. For full details of what each QA national quality standard relates to see the ACECQA website [www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard](http://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard).

*Starting Blocks ([www.startingblocks.gov.au](http://www.startingblocks.gov.au))*

An offshoot website from the ACECQA organisation containing a variety of information on child care. Selecting “find child care” takes you to the search engine, which allows you to search by postcode or key words and you can select a search radius of 5, 10 or 20 km from the search point.
Searches generate an interactive map with a list of facilities underneath. There is a greater emphasis on the ACECQA National Quality Standards in the initial search results than other websites.

Details of the National Quality Standards can be found at www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard. Clicking on the name of the centre gives you the hours of operation but not the availability, which can be found by contacting the centres directly.

Clicking on the “What do the ratings mean?” link takes you to a paraphrased version of the ACECQA standards and rankings are shown below.
CHILD CARE RATINGS

Services are assessed and rated against 7 quality areas of the National Quality Standard:

1. Educational program and practice
   Your child is supported to participate in play and learning

2. Children’s health and safety
   Your child is protected from illness and hazards

3. Physical environment
   Your child plays in a safe and well maintained environment

4. Staffing arrangements
   There are enough qualified staff to give your child the attention they need

5. Relationships with children
   Your child is made to feel supported and welcomed

6. Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
   Local community involvement and respect for the beliefs and values of families

7. Governance and leadership
   Your child is cared for in a positive and well managed environment

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Significant Improvement Required
Service does not meet one of the seven quality areas or a section of the legislation and there is a significant risk to the safety, health and wellbeing of children.

The regulatory authority will take immediate action.

Working Towards National Quality Standard
Service provides a safe education and care program, but there are one or more areas identified for improvement.

Meeting National Quality Standard
Service meets the National Quality Standard.
Service provides quality education and care in all seven quality areas.

Exceeding National Quality Standard
Service goes beyond the requirements of the National Quality Standard in at least four of the seven quality areas.

Excellent
Service promotes exceptional education and care, demonstrates sector leadership, and is committed to continually improving. This rating can only be awarded by ACECQA. Services rated Exceeding National Quality Standard in all 7 Quality Areas may choose to apply for this rating.
eChildCare (www.echildcare.com.au)

An older website with no interactive maps or flashy graphics. It is largely a text-based information system but with some useful links.

The Australian Child Care Index

Looking for "Daycare centers in my area"?
Find Childcare Near You
Enter An Address, Suburb, Postcode or Region

- Long Daycare Centres
- Kindergartens and Preschools
- Before and After School Care
- Occasional Care
- Family Day Care

Search

Featured Services
Kidikindom Child Care - Coonara
Upper Coonara, QLD (4209)

Childcare Services, Nationwide
New South Wales
Sydney
Central Sydney
Western Sydney

Latest Childcare News

The easiest searching strategy is to select a state or using the predetermined suburb profiles at the bottom of the home page. You can also search by suburb name but this doesn’t always give the correct result. Picking a state gives a suburb-by-suburb list of child care centres that you can search by postcode.
Selecting a particular centre gives a summary of the centre’s location, contact details and National Quality Standard rankings (www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard). Nearby centres are also listed by suburb on the right-hand side of the results pane.

Scrolling down gives you more information about opening hours, how many children the centre can take (no vacancy information, contact centre to find this out), meals, who owns the centre, when it was established and links to any other internet presence for the centre, including press announcements.
PHONES
(03) 9388 0777
(03) 8481 1100 (ECMS Head Office)

PLEASE MENTION THE ECICARE WEBSITE WHEN YOU CONTACT THIS SERVICE.

FAX
(03) 9381 0580

OPENING HOURS
7:30am - 6:30pm Monday - Friday

THE CHILDREN
122 children aged 6 weeks - pre-school age

This centre is primarily provided for the use of a specific business's staff, but may also be open to the local community.

MEALS
Meals and Snacks provided

DATE ESTABLISHED
2011

OWNERSHIP/ MANAGEMENT
Early Childhood Management Services

This is a non-profit community based and managed centre.

Centre ABN: 33 012 989 761

ON THE INTERNET ABOUT THINKING KIDS CHILDREN'S CENTRE

• Visit their website
• See more details at mychild.gov.au
• Company/invest in on-site childcare centre, February 20, 2012
• CSL takes top prize in awards, November 10, 2011
• Parkville business is king of the kids, September 18, 2011

Edit This Entry
3. How do I go About Organising Child Care?

By now you should have a fair idea of what is available in your suburb of choice by way of child care centres. The next step is to contact the centres you are interested in sending your child to directly, this is where you will get the most accurate information on:

- Vacancies;
- Waiting list times and fees for registering for places;
- Daily fees;
- Hours of Operation;
- Meals and whether the centre can accommodate any dietary requirements your children may have;
- Age group structure for each cohort (child care centres are often split into different rooms by age and this can vary from centre to centre);
- Staffing ratios, the minimum staff/child ratios are set by law but some centres exceed them;
- Family grouping – some centres group children of different ages together at the beginning/end of the day when they have fewer staff onsite, which may lead to your child being with unfamiliar carers or in an unfamiliar environment with much older/younger children;
- Educational program;
- Whether the centre provides a Kindergarten service (delivered by an early childhood teacher and is mandated by some states as children approach school age to get them used to structured learning);
- Sickness collection policy – some centres call you in and ask you to collect your child “immediately/within the hour” if they have a fever or display other signs of sickness (vomiting, diarrhea etc.). This may seem an encumbrance but your child may fall sick more often at centres that do not have such a policy with sick children lingering about. It is worth checking each centre’s policy on sickness;
- Medicines administration policy – most centres administer prescription medication as directed and some administer Panadol/Nurofen to sick/teething children (often tied up with the sickness collection policy). Medication for teething can mask more serious illnesses and increase the duration/frequency of your child’s sickness and inability to attend day care as the date after which a child can return to care is extended every time they are administered Panadol/Nurofen;
- Days of operation – private facilities are generally open every day except for weekends and public holidays but some centres (particularly council-run ones) may have other shutdown periods in December-January;
- Public holiday fees – some centres give you a day in lieu and reduced fees in the event that a care day falls on a public holiday but most won’t;
- Holiday rates – whether the centre offers reduced rates if you advise them in advance that your child won’t be attending the centre due to taking a holiday. This is not offered universally and is often capped where it is offered;
- Outdoor play and UV policies;
- Excursions;
- Incursions – does the centre invite in external contractors to provide activities for your children (examples include Zumba/dance instructors, musical sing-alongs, playschool-type demos);
- Other services – e.g., hairdresser/barber, mobile dentist;
- Parental involvement;
- Whether the centre supplies nappies/wipes or whether you have to supply them; and
- Any other issues you would like to discuss.
Every child care centre is subtly different and it would be a good idea to visit the centre prior to sending your child there without you. This will give you an opportunity to get a feel for the environment and whether your child likes it. Some long day care centres will allow an induction/trial period, where you can take your child to the centre and either remain with them or go into another room so that you can be certain that your child is happy in their new setting before committing to a centre.

Each individual centre will have its own procedures with regards to payment of fees, induction onto waiting lists, what the children need to bring with them, procedure for arriving and departing with your child and so on. Usually they will have a handbook outlining the responsibilities of all parties that you should read before committing your child to a centre. If the conditions listed in the handbook are not met, it is possible that your child could lose their place at the centre.

Given the level of demand for child care, places are not generally held by centres. In the author’s experience no government subsidy is provided if you pay for a place in advance of your child attending i.e., to hold a spot you must pay the full daily rate until your child attends, at which point government subsidy will start to be paid. This is worth noting if you are offered a space but had planned to take extended holidays immediately prior to your child starting their attendance at a centre – particularly if demand is high in your area and you are concerned that your child will not get a place upon your return. Discuss this with your centre of choice if you think there will be an issue.

Centres discharge the care of their elder children to school in January/February in the Australian educational cycle and so this is often the time of greatest intake as they bump children up from the younger rooms to the older rooms where appropriate to open up spaces. This can result in a bottleneck of spaces opening up around September-December each year as children wait to move onward and upward. Mondays and Fridays are also often in lower demand than Tuesday-Thursday as they clash with public holidays (that you usually still have to pay for) and so if you want to pick up a day easily it would be worth asking about availability of these days at first. It helps to be on good, even familiar, terms with the manager of a child care centre so that when positions become available you are the person they think of for the slot.

Once you have your child enrolled in a centre (you are “in the system” with a “foot in the door”) it is often easier to move to another day when it becomes available than trying to get the day you initially want from the outset and you may also be able to pick up extra days on an ad hoc week-by-week basis as required depending on availability. This can be an effective strategy for getting your child into care, book them in for a single day before you really need it and transition to more days as and when you need them or if they become available. This helps your child adjust to the new environment before it becomes a mainstream part of their week. Furthermore, families already enrolled with a child care centre often get priority for claiming days that become available in the September-December period in the lead up to new intake.

Once you have settled on the right child care option for your family and have registered with a child care centre, you can then register for Government financial assistance if you are eligible.
4. What Financial Support can I Access for Child Care?

As of 2nd July 2018, the system of government financial assistance for child care is changing. The previous child care rebate and child care benefit are being combined into a single payment – the child care subsidy. The child care subsidy is generally paid directly to your child care provider and is passed on to you by way of a fee reduction. You therefore need to know who the childcare provider is before registering for the child care subsidy as this reduces the fees that you pay directly to the child care provider. You can check your eligibility for the child care subsidy at www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/child-care-subsidy. The broad eligibility requirements are shown below.

Use the tabs at the right or the bottom of the screen to find more detailed information on eligibility, payments, how to claim and manage your rebate. e.g., under the Eligibility tab you will find:

There are immunisation requirements attached to the receipt of the child care subsidy. Your child must be up to date with their immunisations as outlined in the National Immunisation Program Schedule, be on a catch up schedule or have a medical exemption. If errors exist in your child’s vaccination record (even a minor typo can lead to this) contact the administering medical clinic to amend the record, they should either be able to do this directly or will have the contact details for
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January 2019

The database administrators at Medicare who can do this for you. There are also requirements relating to your residency/visa status to consider. More specifics about these rules are given in the tabs under “Eligibility”.

If eligible, the amount of child care benefit that you will receive depends on a number of factors, including:

- Your combined income as a family;
- The amount the parent(s)/primary carer(s) work in a week (called the activity level or hours of activity, and includes a reasonable amount of time taken for parents to travel from the child care facility to their place of work); and
- The type of child care service you are using, which sets an hourly cap on the subsidy you receive.

Specific information as to how each of these factors affects the child care subsidy you receive is given under the “Payments” tab and there are links to online calculators to help you estimate your subsidy.

To claim the child care subsidy you need to have a Centrelink account linked to a MyGov account. If you already have a Centrelink account linked to your MyGov account, then the process should be
fairly straightforward and there is a link to the MyGov website under the Claiming tab. Follow this link to MyGov, which will guide you to Centrelink through the Centrelink tab and complete the tasks required to claim the child care subsidy.

If you do not have a MyGov or Centrelink account you must set them both up and link them, linking is done through the MyGov website. To get an online Centrelink account you need a Centrelink Customer Reference Number (CRN), which you may already have if you have applied previously for or received a Centrelink payment. If you don’t have a CRN you will need to visit a Centrelink service centre with photo ID to register for an account. Once you have linked a Centrelink account to your MyGov account, you can process your claim for child care by completing the child care subsidy assessment. A full guide to the process for claiming the child care subsidy online can be found by clicking on the “claim Child Care Subsidy” link above the “Start your claim online” section (as highlighted above).

After you have completed your personalised assessment, you will be asked for any documentary evidence required to process your claim, which can be submitted online. Once all documents are uploaded the claim can be submitted. You will receive notification of your approved child care subsidy through the Centrelink page on MyGov if you have registered for online notifications. There is a section on understanding your approved subsidy under the “Claiming” tab.
As your assessment for the child care subsidy is directly related to your annual income and work (activity) hours that you provide, the payments you receive will be dictated by your assessment of those quantities. Your subsidy claim is linked to your tax return through the MyGov website – therefore, if you underestimate your annual income and receive a larger subsidy than you are entitled to, the Government will claim this back at the end of the tax year. Vice versa, if you overestimate your income you may receive a top up to the subsidy when you submit your tax return. The government typically withholds 5% of the payments until tax time in case you have underestimated your taxable income and have been over-subsidised, the final 5% of payments are made come tax time if your original income assessment is accurate. These details are outlined in your assessment notification.

If you think your circumstances have changed and your assessment becomes inaccurate, you can change it by following the processes outlined under the “Management” tab.
This tab also gives information about what happens to your subsidy if your child is absent from care (42 days of absences are subsidised without evidence, including public holidays), what details are required and how to report changes in your circumstances. Note that you still have to pay for days that you have committed to but that your child is absent from child care, otherwise you will lose your child’s place at the centre.
5. Summary of Websites

Please find below a summary of the relevant websites containing information regarding child care described in this guide.

Types of child care available

http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/what_type_of_child_care_is_best_for_me.html

Finding child care centres or family day care

http://www.careforkids.com.au
http://www.startingblocks.gov.au
http://www.echildcare.com.au

National Quality Framework and Standards


Financial assistance provided by the Australian Government


Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Karyn Clulow, Jackie How, Karen McConalogue, Anubhav Srivastava, Sonya Agarwal, Natalie Trevaskis and Alison Thistlethwaite for adding their perspective and proof reading the guide.