

From: Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment
To: [Kennedy, Heather J](#)
Subject: IMPORTANT - NEW COVID-19 INFO - Letter from Dr Ros Baxter, Deputy Secretary
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NEW COVID-19 INFO
Letter from Dr Ros Baxter, Deputy Secretary



Dear early childhood education and care providers and services

This week the Government introduced and passed legislative amendments to Family Assistance Law that will help families and early childhood education and care services manage the impact of the COVID-19 related events.

The amendments allow the Minister for Education to:

- increase the number of allowable absence days a child can access beyond 42 for an exceptional event or circumstance, such as COVID-19
- prescribe that additional absences (when allowable absences are exhausted) can be taken in relation to COVID-19 without evidence.

These measures will ensure continuity of fee relief where children are not able to attend a service as well as ensure that families have ample absence days for COVID-19 circumstances and for other normally accepted absences. The amendments also respond to your views and input that it may be difficult in some circumstances to obtain a medical certificate for COVID-19 related events.

In this unprecedented time, it becomes more likely that early childhood education and care services will be directed to close, on public health advice, for a short period of time because of COVID-19. Where this happens, and services choose to continue to charge families, a period of local emergency under Family Assistance Law will be recognised, and Child Care Subsidy will continue to be paid directly to services on behalf of families. This will provide some continuity for services and families alike as we work through the impacts of COVID-19 together.

A further amendment made to Family Assistance Law allows the Minister to prescribe that where services are directed to close on public health advice, they do not need to recover any out of pocket expenses from families, enabling fee relief during such difficult circumstances. This applies for the duration of the public health enforced closure.

Minister's Rules to support these legislative changes have been made and they outline how these measures take effect. These rules include:

- all families will be allocated an additional 20 days of allowable absences to use in the 2019-2020 financial year
- if additional absences are required for COVID-19 related reasons, medical evidence will not be required – active until 31 December 2020
- services will not be required to recover gap fees between now and 31 December 2020 where they are instructed to close on public health direction [Note: A legislative requirement is in place that providers must not increase fees during this period.]

As the Prime Minister has mentioned, continuing essential services such as early childhood education and care (while it is safe to do so) is crucial to continuing the education of our children, and to enabling parents, including health care professionals, to continue to work and support the broader community. It also reduces the reliance on alternative care arrangements such as grandparents or elderly relatives who are typically at higher risk of COVID-19.

These amendments are as a result of close consultation with your representative groups who continue to work with me and my team to understand your concerns and practical issues during this time and develop further options for support. I greatly appreciate the feedback you have provided to my staff and myself, which has been important in giving effect to these important changes to support services and families.

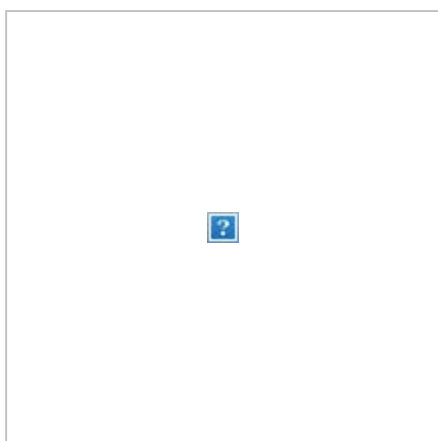
I again thank you for the invaluable support you are providing to Australian children and families, and to the educators in your services.

Further information is available on the new [coronavirus \(COVID-19\) information sheet regarding periods of local emergency and absences for child care providers and services](#).

On Thursday, 26 March from 1:30pm – 2:00pm (AEDT), we are holding a second webcast for child care providers and services to discuss the new support mechanisms announced this week.

Providers and services can watch the webcast live [here](#). The link will only activate 5 minutes prior to the webcast commencing.

Regards



Dr Ros Baxter
Deputy Secretary
Early Childhood and Child Care
Department of Education, Skills and Employment

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