Title: Early Childhood Education and Care Participation Minimum Gap Payment

Policy: CPADC640-2

Policy Statement
The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (the department) has a legislative responsibility to provide for a child’s developmental, educational and intellectual needs when they are residing in out-of-home care.

Research shows that access to early learning experiences is important for children’s development. These experiences can be gained through quality centre-based child care and kindergarten, and informal social and learning activities.

High quality child care and kindergarten has been associated with more highly developed cognitive and language capacities, as well as more cooperative and less oppositional or aggressive behaviour. Centre-based child care and kindergarten can be associated with higher levels of language and cognitive development than informal, home based education and care.

Principles
- Early childhood education is beneficial for the development of toddlers and young children.
- Foster and kinship carers will be supported to access child care and kindergarten for children in their care.

Objective
The aim of this policy is to enhance a child’s early education and learning opportunities, to help improve life-long educational outcomes.

The ‘Early childhood education and care participation minimum gap payment’ will provide young children with greater access to centre-based child care and kindergarten, by assisting foster and kinship carers with these out-of-pocket costs.

Scope:
This policy acknowledges that the costs arising from a child’s attendance in centre-based child care and kindergarten are not included as part of the Fortnightly Caring Allowance.

The policy provides payment of an ‘Early childhood education and care participation minimum gap payment’ of $40 per week per child ($2000 per annum) to assist carers meet the costs arising from the child’s attendance at centre-based child care and kindergarten.
If the amount payable is less than $40 per week, the department will pay the full gap cost. Prior approval of the financial delegate is not required.

To be eligible for this payment, the child will:

- be aged one to five years and not yet commenced prep
- be 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 kindergarten, long day care or limited-hours care service.

Where the out-of-pocket costs exceed the Australian Government child care payments, and the ‘Early childhood education and care participation minimum gap cost payment’, further financial assistance for the carer may be available through child related costs (CRC) – refer to Policy 598 CRC - Client Support. This is different to the ‘Early childhood education and care participation minimum gap payment’, as it is a discretionary payment requiring the pre-approval of the CSSC Manager, after all other entitlements have been used.

Children subject to a child protection order granting long-term guardianship to a suitable person under the Child Protection Act 1999 may be considered for this payment where it has been approved as part of the case plan for the child, prior to an application being made to the Children’s Court.

Approved child care services are those approved by the Department of Human Services for eligibility for Australian Government payments such as Child Care Benefit (CCB) and Child Care Rebate (CCR), because they meet certain standards and requirements. Where the carer’s eligibility for CCB and CCR has been established by the Australian Government, this is regarded as confirmation of an approved child care service. For the purpose of the ‘Early childhood education and care participation minimum gap payment’ only a selection of these child care service types will be eligible, specifically long day care, limited hours care and kindergarten.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Child Safety Officer and the carer will discuss a child’s attendance at a child care service or kindergarten program, which may include consideration of the reasons for the child attending child care, the type of child care being considered, the selection of a child care service, the hours of attendance required, the proposed cost and the financial support being sought. In some situations, Child Safety may seek to include the views of the child’s parents.

Carers are required to lodge an application for CCB to the Australian Government, Department of Human Services, as administered through Centrelink. This application will automatically test their eligibility for the CCR. Even if a carer has zero entitlement to CCB, they may still be eligible to receive the CCR. When carers are completing this claim, it is advisable for the carer to elect to have Australian Government payments directly to the child care service as a fee reduction.

Child Safety Officers must identify, through ICMS, in the child’s ‘education tab’, that the child attends early childhood education.

Financial processing

The financial processing requires use of the following general ledger codes:

- 530203 ECEC PA - Kindergarten
- 530204 ECEC PA - Long Day Care/Limited-Hours Care
Payment should be made to the carer as a reimbursement claim.

To pay an invoice or reimburse a claim with departmental monies, the payment must be:
- approved by the appropriate financial delegate, and
- substantiated with supporting documentation.

The supporting documentation required to pay a child care service provider is a valid tax invoice. The invoice should specify the total hours/charges for the period in question, the amount paid through CCB, the amount paid through CCR, any other Australian Government deductions specific to child care payments, and also display the final amount owing (the gap payment).

The supporting document required for a reimbursement to the carer is a claimant’s declaration of the entitlement of monies, a CRC Approval Form (page 1) and an invoice from the child care service provider.

Processing of these payments can be done in conjunction with other child related costs. For example, if approval has been given to provide financial support to enable a child to attend kindergarten, then the agreed total payment can be made to the service provider on one payment form - with the weekly $40 entitlement costed to GL 530203 and the remainder costed to the relevant child related cost. Where the payment is being made as part of Child Related Costs, then the relevant CRC Approval Form is required.

The preferred method of payment is eGPEV (Electronic - General Purpose Expenditure Voucher) or corporate card. Please refer to Policy FSE013 Payments for further information.

Authority:

Child Protection Act 1999, sections 4, 5A, 5B, 12, 13, 122, 159C
Financial Accountability Act 2009
Financial and Performance Management Standard 2009

Delegations

The use of child related costs will be in accordance with departmental financial delegations and standards.
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Office: Child, Family and Community Services Commissioning
Help Contact: Child Protection and Adoption Design and Commissioning

Links:
Child Safety Practice Manual, Chapter 4, 5

Related policies and procedures:
Case planning (263)
Immunisation of children in out-of-home care (638)
Child related costs – client support and family contact (598)
Information exchange and service delivery co-ordination (403)

Legislation:
Child Protection Act 1999
Financial Accountability Act 2009

Related Government Guidelines:
Statement of commitment between the Department of Child Safety and the foster care services and the carers of Queensland
Schedule of Financial Delegations
Financial Management Practice Manual

Rescinded Policies:
Early Childhood Education in Care – Kindy-Costs-Gap initiative (637)

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