

December Early Childhood Connect 2024 Start Strong Roadmap FAQ

Question	Answer
<p>Where can I find more information?</p>	<p>More information can be found at our 2024 Start Strong for Long Day Care FAQs</p> <p>https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/operating-an-early-childhood-education-service/grants-and-funded-programs/start-strong-funding/start-strong-for-long-day-care/2024-start-strong-for-long-day-care-faqs#Fee4</p> <p>2024 Start Strong for Long Day Care program guidelines</p> <p>https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/operating-an-early-childhood-education-service/grants-and-funded-programs/start-strong-funding/start-strong-for-long-day-care/2024-start-strong-for-long-day-care-program-guidelines</p>
<p>Program description:</p>	
<p>How does the funding support children and families?</p>	<p>Funding under all 4 streams is paid to the approved provider of the eligible service who then expends funding to support eligible children and families access a quality preschool program.</p> <p>The 4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment (formerly known as Trial Payment) enables services to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> improve the quality of the preschool program provided to children by supporting capability uplift of early childhood teachers (ECTs) and educators, the attraction and retention of ECTs and educators, purchase

	<p>of educational resources and program development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reach out to their community to offer and promote quality early childhood education. <p>The 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment enables services to improve affordability for families of eligible children by reducing the cost of early childhood education. Services pass on fee relief to the families of eligible children as a weekly reduction to a family’s session fee or gap fee (after the Child Care Subsidy has been applied) allocated across the total service operating weeks for the calendar year.</p>
<p>Child Eligibility Criteria:</p>	
<p>I have a child who received the 4YO Program Payment in 2023 but has decided not to start school until 2025. Is this child eligible for the 4YO Program Payment for 2024?</p>	<p>A currently enrolled child who is not yet in compulsory schooling is eligible for funding in 2024 provided they meet other child eligibility criteria and have completed a new Declaration and consent form for 2024.</p>
<p>We have children that turn 4 after July 2023. Parents were asking for fee relief to be passed on. Does that mean that children who turn 4 after July 2023 are not eligible for fee relief till January 2024?</p>	<p>Under the 2023 guidelines, to be eligible for funding, a child will need to be at least 4 years old on, or before, 31 July 2023.</p> <p>In 2024, to be eligible for 4YO+ Program Payment and 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment funding under Start Strong, a child will need to be the age of 4 years old on, or before, 31 July 2024 (the child’s birthdate must be on, or before, 31 July 2020).</p>
<p>How is equity funding determined in 2024 for 4YO Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment?</p>	<p>An additional 50% loading is provided for Equity Enrolments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children; or if the service is located in a geographic area (Statistical Area Level 2) with a Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Decile of 1 and 2 (ranking within NSW) on the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage 2021. <p>SEIFA information of the service is determined by the Australian Government using the SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage 2021 provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).</p>

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Calculation and payment of funding:	
<p>Are we able to get a break down of how our payments are worked out and paid rather than just a lump sum?</p>	<p>The department will communicate initial funding amounts, including a breakdown of loadings and the number of eligible fee relief enrolments funded, to the approved providers of eligible services via email.</p> <p>Services will also receive a Payment Advice from the department via email for each payment made. The Reference No. column indicates whether the payment is related to the 4YO+ Program Payment, 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment, 3YO Program Trial Payment, or 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment. The Details column indicates which service the payment is for.</p>
<p>What dates are used to calculate 4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial payments?</p>	<p>Initial 4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment funding allocations for 2024 will be calculated using the NSW Enrolment data from June 2023 provided by the Australian Government.</p>
<p>When will the payments be made?</p>	<p>If the provider has accepted Terms and Conditions, fee relief payments will be made from December 2023, with program payments following from January 2024.</p> <p>The Program guidelines include the timing of payments in 2024.</p>

Question	Answer
Declaration and consent:	
Do parents need to do another Declaration and consent form for 2024?	<p>Families of eligible children must complete a new Declaration and consent form for 2024 Start Strong for LDC.</p> <p>Declaration and consent forms from previous years are unable to be used for the current funding year.</p>
Do we need to get the declaration for a child who attends our centre and another centre, even if they are not claiming the start strong fee relief from our centre?	<p>Services are required to collect a completed Declaration and consent form for all enrolled children that are eligible for fee relief, regardless of whether the family wants to access fee relief at your service.</p>
Can we back date the funding to the date the child started with us if the parent has not completed the form until later?	<p>It is at the discretion of the service whether to backdate fee relief by applying a credit to the family's account.</p> <p>If the service has sufficient fee relief funding, it is strongly encouraged that funding is backdated to the beginning of the child's enrolment in 2024.</p>
If a family 'accidentally' claims fee relief at two services. will the service be required to repay the department?	<p>Services are not responsible for repaying any fee relief funding provided to families who have incorrectly asked for it at their service.</p>
If a child received the 3 YO Fee relief and then turned 4 YO within the year, do they need to fill out a new fee relief form for 4 YO?	<p>The declaration and consent form can be used for all eligible children who are at least 3 years old on or before 31 July 2024. Families will need to complete a separate form for each eligible child enrolled at your service.</p>

Question	Answer
<p>Spending rules and activities:</p>	
<p>Can remaining 2023 and 2024 fee relief payment funding be used to pay salary and wages for early childhood teachers and educators?</p>	<p>Fee Relief Payment funds must only be used to provide fee relief to the families of eligible children at least 4 years old on, or before, 31 July 2023.</p> <p>Unspent fee relief funds in 2023, may be used to reduce the fees for eligible children not accessing fee relief at the service or in line with Section 4.1.1 Program Payment spending rules. Funds must be expended before the end of 2023.</p> <p>In 2024, unspent fee relief funds can only be used to reduce fees or additional charges imposed on eligible children.</p> <p>4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial payments can be used to pay salary and wages for early childhood teachers and educators.</p>
<p>Can remaining fee relief money in 2023 be used for disadvantaged families to reduce fees further, or must this money come from the program payment instead of the fee relief?</p>	<p>The 2023 fee relief payment spending rules (4.1.2) allow services in Term 4 to reduce the fees for eligible children not accessing fee relief at the service, for example children of families with greatest need.</p> <p>Program Payment funds may also be used as an interim measure to provide fee relief to families, where the initial Fee Relief Payment allocation does not cover the number of eligible children accessing fee relief.</p>

Question	Answer
Spending rules and activities:	
<p>If the gap fee is lower than the fee relief and the account is credited, is this credit refunded to the department or to the parent?</p>	<p>Where a family’s gap fees have been reduced to zero in a regular billing period, the remaining fee relief is considered a surplus. The approved provider must spend Surplus Funds to cover any additional charges imposed on the eligible child, such as levies. Remaining Surplus Funds from the 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment may then be used to reduce the fees for children that are 3 years old and not yet 4 years old on, or before, 31 July 2024 (the child’s birthdate must be on, or between, 1 August 2020 to 31 July 2021) at the discretion of the service, for example children of families with greatest need. Remaining Surplus Funds from the 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment may then be used to reduce the fees for children that are 4 years old on, or before, 31 July 2024 (the child’s birthdate must be on, or before, 31 July 2020) at the discretion of the service, for example children of families with greatest need.</p> <p>Remaining Surplus Funds from the 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment may then be used to reduce the fees for children that are 4 years old on, or before, 31 July 2024 (the child’s birthdate must be on, or before, 31 July 2020) at the discretion of the service, for example children of families with greatest need.</p> <p>See Section 4.3 of the 2024 guidelines for further details.</p>

Question	Answer
Service Eligibility:	
<p>Does our Early Childhood Teacher need to be delivering the program in the preschool room or can they be the Educational Leader and be guiding the delivery?</p>	<p>Approved Providers are required to deliver a quality early childhood education program to children aged 4 and above, that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher in accordance with the requirements under the National Quality Framework, and • using the Early Years Learning Framework

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Technical Specification:	
<p>What software updates if any are required to be made by software companies and how will that affect 2024 and when will those changes if any be announced?</p>	<p>Changes to the technical specification were announced December 2023. Appendix 3 of the 2024 guidelines details fee relief data collection and reporting requirements and provides a link to the technical specification. Services are required to use the updated technical specification from 1st January 2024.</p>
<p>Are all Child Care Management System providers ready for Start Strong 2024? What will services require from their software providers?</p>	<p>The department contacted registered Child Care Subsidy software providers regarding the 2024 software requirements under Start Strong for Long Day Care program. Services are encouraged to contact their software providers to ensure their software is up to date. Software requirements are detailed in 2024 guidelines. Appendix 3 in the guidelines https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/operating-an-early-childhood-education-service/grants-and-funded-programs/start-strong-funding/start-strong-for-long-day-care/2024-start-strong-for-long-day-care-program-guidelines#Appendix_31</p>
Transition to School Statement:	
<p>What happens to the fee relief paid, when parents refuse to sign the Transition to School Statement consent form?</p>	<p>If a parent or carer does not provide consent, you cannot create a Digital Transition to School Statement for their child. For ECEC services accessing Start Strong funding, if parents do not consent to creation of a statement, the consent form must be retained for funding compliance. The fee relief does not have to be returned by the family.</p>
Financial Accountability:	
<p>How do we report fee relief spending to the department?</p>	<p>In accordance with the Terms and Conditions, Approved Providers must submit a financial accountability for each individual service which has received funding, to provide assurance that public funds have been expended for their intended purpose.</p> <p>Financial accountability is completed through ECCMS and Approved Providers will be notified when this is due. Further information is available in the Financial Accountability Return Guide and on the Financial Accountability - Information for Services page.</p>

Question	Answer
Digital Hub:	
Will digital hub replace ECCMS?	<p>Over time, Digital Hub will replace the Early Childhood Contract Management System (ECCMS) which has been used to manage funding and contracting arrangements between the department and ECEC providers for over a decade.</p> <p>ECCMS will be phased out when functionality is replaced by the new Digital Hub system and users are progressively onboarded.</p>
Can you define "basic staff data" that you will collect and what is the basic staff data that will need to be included in CCMS to transfer to the ECO Digital Hub?	<p>The new system is being developed in close consultation with ECEC services and the data collection component is being worked on in partnership with child care management software (CCMS) system providers. More detail about data collection will be provided in 2024.</p>
Will we see changes to digital hub in 2025?	<p>An initial pilot will be run with a group of community preschools in 2024. Once the testing is complete, providers will be progressively invited to onboard to the Digital Hub, starting in 2025. The introduction of the Digital Hub will require changes to be made by some ECEC services to enhance their digital capability.</p>
Promoting the program:	
Is there promotional material that we can use to promote for children of families particularly those with greatest needs?	<p>Whilst the department does not provide a specific template, the Start Strong Long Day Care web pages including the 2024 guideline content and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) provide detailed information to assist services in developing individual service communication approaches to inform families of funding and entitlements.</p>