



Policy and Procedures Payment of Fees

Acacia Children's Centres (Acacia) is a not-for-profit, community-based organisation. Acacia has a commitment to maintaining fees at the lowest possible level whilst providing a high-quality service and acknowledging the qualifications, skills and dedication of staff.

Acacia believes that all children have a right of equal access to quality education and care services, regardless of economic status, cultural background or disability.

Fees are calculated annually based on budget estimates. Fees are applied throughout a financial year (July to June). Each Centre's annual budget determines the maximum fee for one week's care. Families will be notified within 14 days of any fee changes. Each Centre also provides regular information on fees for Parents via newsletters, the SchoolStream app and signs on the notice boards within the Centre.

To continue to provide an affordable, quality service, Acacia's Centres must charge fees that allow them to remain economically viable. The fees charged, along with funds received from the State and Federal governments and through fundraising will cover operating costs. These include staff salaries, salary on costs, relief staff, in-service training, children's food, drink and consumables, replacement of worn out equipment, acquisition of new equipment and materials for the children, office materials, telephone, electricity, cleaning, maintenance and repairs.

Childcare fees will be calculated after the payment of CCS (Child Care Subsidy); in addition, some families may be eligible for additional top up payments in 4 different elements - Child wellbeing, Grandparents, Temporary financial hardship or Transition to work. Fees are not subject to Goods and Services Tax (GST).

Fees are charged immediately on the first commencing week. Fees are due and payable 2 weeks in advance.

Making payments (direct debit)

Payment of fees are paid via Direct Debit. At the time of enrolment, all families will nominate an account for fees to be taken out from. Account statements are available on the XPLOR home app.

The owing fees will be direct debited out of the family's nominated account each fortnight as dictated by Acacia. Acacia will absorb any processing fees associated with the direct debit process. Credit card payments will incur a fee and these will be passed onto the family.

Any dishonoured fees will be passed onto the family. This fee is set by the direct debit company. Once statements show that a family is behind with their payments, they will receive communication from the Centre Director verbally or via email requesting payment. Once a family's fees are overdue by 4 weeks, a formal letter will be issued requesting immediate payment or to discuss alternative care arrangements.

Payment Plans may be made to families experiencing financial hardship based on Management discretion.

If a child is absent for any reason (including sickness and holidays), the full daily fee is still applied. The full daily fee also applies on Public Holidays. During Acacia's annual summer holiday (3 weeks), fees will not apply.

Part time bookings for childcare are available but must total a minimum of 1 full day. Part time spaces are allocated strictly according to availability, whereby full-time places take priority over part time attendance.



Fees are applied to the below conditions or situations:

- Full fee is required for all public holidays.
- Full fee is payable when the child takes any holiday during the year whilst the Centre is in operation.
- Notice to withdraw from a Centre must be given 2 weeks before the actual date of leaving. In case parents/guardians would like to withdraw their child from the Centre 2 weeks before the Christmas-closing-period, fees must be paid in full (even where 2 weeks' notice has been given).
- Full fees are charged for booked attendances. There is no reduction for days booked but not attended.
- notifying parents/guardians within 14 days of any proposed changes to the Fees charged or the way in which the Fees are collected
- Full fees are charged when children are away sick, or when they are excluded during outbreaks of infectious illness for which they have not been immunised.
- In the event of a long-term illness, families are advised to negotiate an alternative arrangement with the Director.

The Centre reserves the right to cancel a booking if fees are outstanding and satisfactory arrangements have not been put in place. The Centre will employ a service to pursue bad debts. Acacia will proceed to legal action when other approaches have been exhausted.

Late Collection Fee

Regulations require two staff members to be present at a Centre whenever children are present. Although our staff are dedicated, each staff member has a family and home for which he/she is responsible. The Centre applies a late collection fee for parents who collect their child after the Centre closing time (6.00pm at Richmond and Fitzroy and St Albans). The late collection fee is designed to act as a deterrent as it is important to protect the rights of staff to finish work at the end of their shift.

Where a parent is running late, they are required to contact the Centre as soon as possible to inform staff of the delay and the expected time of arrival. If a child has not been picked up by 6.00pm, Centre staff must contact parents/guardians at home or on their business phone number. The emergency number will be contacted if parents or guardian are not available, to arrange alternative collection. If a parent is extremely late and all attempts to reach emergency contacts have failed, staff will report the incident to Child Protection Emergency Service.

Late collection fee is \$25 for the first 15 minutes or part there of, and \$2.00 for every minute following. The Child Care Subsidy (CCS) is not paid on this fee. The late collection fee is due and payable the following morning. This ensures that children and staff welfare is considered.

If parents/guardians are consistently late, the Director will arrange an interview where alternative care options for their child can be discussed.

Child Care Subsidy Package

CCS (Child Care Subsidy) is a payment made by the Commonwealth Government to families to assist with the cost of childcare fees.

Centrelink will assess and determine a family's level of Childcare Subsidy. The 3 things that will determine a family's level of CCS are:



1. A family's combined income.
2. Activity test (activity level of the parent undertaking the least activity);
3. Service type (type of childcare service being subsidised).

Activity test:

The higher the level of activity (work, training, study) will equal more hours of childcare subsidised. The following factors will determine the level of activity:

- Amount of work, training, study, volunteering and other recognised activity carried out;
- Paid and unpaid leave;
- Travel time to work from the centre;
- Exemptions such as disability, carers, incarceration.

Maximum hours of subsidy per week

The following table explains how many hours of subsidy you will be entitled for based on your level of activity:

Activity level each fortnight	Hours of subsidised care each fortnight
Less than 8 hours	0 hours if you earn above threshold 24 hours if you earn below threshold
More than 8 to 16 hours	36 hours
More than 16 to 48 hours	72 hours
More than 48 hours	100 hours

Centrelink will advise families what percentage of the hourly fee they will pay, and a gap fee will apply. Parent/guardian must apply to claim CCS by contacting Centrelink before commencing care or full fees will apply.

CCS will not be paid if a child does not attend on the first day of expected attendance or the last day of attendance, if leaving the Centre. Full fees will apply in these circumstances.

To claim the CCS families are required to:

- Log into MyGov account
- Access Centrelink online account
- Provide new information and confirm current details such as:
 1. Family income estimate
 2. Activity test
 3. Childcare details
 4. Confirm enrolments

To claim the CCS families are required to provide Acacia with the following information:

- Child's Full Name and Date of Birth
- Child's Centrelink Customer Reference Number (CRN)
- Registered Parent/Guardian Full Name and Date of Birth
- Registered Parent/Guardian Centrelink Customer Reference Number (CRN)
- Notification of if the child attends another service
- Total number of children who are registered with Centrelink and are accessing any type of registered care (as this will determine the number of child percentage the family will receive).

It is the responsibility of the registered parent/guardian to notify Acacia of any change to the number of children the family has accessing registered care, and failure to update these details may result in a debt incurred by the family.



Adult Migrant English Program

The Australian Government, Department of Immigration and Citizenship provides free childcare for non-school children if their parents are required to attend classes while participating in the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). The cost of AMEP- related childcare is the responsibility of AMEP service providers, the participant is not eligible for CCS.

Additional Child Care Subsidies

Extra support on top of the Childcare Subsidy can be applied for through Centrelink. Parents/guardians should contact Centrelink if they believe they could be eligible for one of the following:

Grandparent Allowance

This is available to grandparents who:

- meet the existing CCS eligibility requirements;
- are receiving an income support payment from DHS or the Department of Veterans' Affairs.
- have 65% or greater care responsibility.
- have substantial autonomy for day-to-day decisions about the grandchild's care, welfare and development.

This benefit payment is only available to grandparents who claim CCS as reduced fees and cannot be claimed as a lump sum. It may cover up to 100% of fees charged up to 100 hours per fortnight. Grandparents claiming need to apply directly to the DHS. Grandparents must notify the DSS (Department of Social Services) before the grandchild/ren leave their care or of any other change in their circumstances. Any additional payment for grandparents will cease from the date grandparents no longer meet the eligibility requirements.

Transition to work

This additional payment provides extra help with the cost of CCS approved childcare for eligible parents undertaking activities such as job search, work, study or rehabilitation as part of an Employment Pathway Plan, to help parents/guardians enter or re-enter the workforce.

This is available to parents receiving the following income support payments:

- Parenting Payment.
- Newstart Allowance.
- Disability support pension.
- Youth Allowance (for job seekers, not full-time students).

Temporary Financial Hardship

This additional payment provides short- term assistance for up to 100% fees and for 100 hour per fortnight of the cost of CCS approved child care.

Families make the application to Centerlink for 13 weeks assistance per event.

Child Wellbeing

This additional payment provides assistance for up to 100% fees and for 100 hours per fortnight of the cost of CCS approved child care.

Service providers initiate payment on behalf of the families to support vulnerable children who are at risk of abuse or neglect. Additional applications will be determined by the Department of Human Services.

Absences



According to the guidelines from Department of Social Services in Child Care Service Handbook, Child Care Subsidy (CCS) is paid in certain circumstances when a family is charged for care that their child does not attend. Absences are categorised into two groups: absence days and additional absence days.

Initial 42 absence days

CCS is paid for up to 42 absence days for each child per financial year across all approved long day care services. Absence days are referred to as 'Initial 42 days absence' in the family assistance law.

- Each child receives a new set of initial 42 absence days at the beginning of the financial year.
- These absence days can be taken for any reason (provided the day being reported as an absence is a day on which care would have otherwise been provided).

Additional absence days

Once all the first 42 absence days have been used, CCS will also be payable for absences taken for these reasons:

- illness (with a medical certificate);
- non-immunisation (with written evidence);
- rostered days off/rotating shift work (with written evidence);
- temporary closure of a school or pupil-free days;
- periods of local emergency;
- shared care arrangements due to a court order, parenting plan or parenting order (with copy of documentation);
- attendance at pre-school;
- exceptional circumstances.

Absence days taken for the above reasons, after the first 42 absence days have been used, are called 'additional absence days'. There is no limit on the number of these days for which CCS may be paid, as long as:

- they are taken for the reasons specified above, and
- supporting documentation (where required) is provided, and
- they are days on which care would otherwise have been provided.

The Centre can only claim CCS if these guidelines are followed, otherwise maximum fees will be applied.

References

Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority,

- *National Quality Framework Resource Kit*, 2011

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

- *Belonging, Being & Becoming - The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* Commonwealth of Australia 2009
- <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/child-care-subsidy>

BREACH OF THIS POLICY

- Any educator or staff found to have violated this policy may be subject to disciplinary action.

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