

3-year-old preschool fact sheet

For families and communities

As parents and carers, you play the most important role in your child's development. But you don't have to go it alone.

The state government is rolling out 3-year-old preschool to help give your child a flying start to life.

Two years are better than one

The evidence shows that 2 years are better than one when it comes to play-based early learning. This is why we're giving children access to the quality, teacher-led preschool programs they deserve earlier.

Preschool programs help children to thrive when they are young and set them up for a stronger start to school and beyond.

All children benefit, especially children who have additional needs, or are experiencing disadvantage or vulnerability.

It is for this reason, consistent with the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, South Australia is introducing universal 3-year-old preschool from 2026.

The roll-out

We'll be partnering with long day care services, government and other sessional preschools to deliver universal 3-year-old preschool programs.

The roll-out of this new program will happen from 2026 to 2032. A staged approach is required to build the necessary workforce supply of qualified staff and, in some cases, create more infrastructure.

For more information, see the FAQs in this document and www.earlychildhood.sa.gov.au/3-year-old-preschool-roll-out.

Our vision

Over the next decade, we will purposefully build a stronger early childhood system that puts children and families first, where:

- you and your child can build trusted relationships with quality early childhood education and care providers who understand your child
- extra support is available for children who need it to reach their full potential, embedded within and connected to preschool programs
- you'll have greater access to quality preschool programs that meet the practical needs of you and your child's everyday lives.

The best learning is child's play!

In a teacher-led, play-based 3-year-old preschool program at long day care or sessional preschool you will find children:

- playing, getting messy, and being involved in moments of wonder
- laughing and engaging with each other and their teachers and educators, which helps them to make friends and build social skills
- expressing their feelings in a safe and secure environment, which builds their capacity to understand and manage their emotions
- learning through well-designed play-based experiences, including mastering new words and ideas, becoming more physically confident, learning about nature and cultures, and sharing and creating great stories.

Early learning services should also be inclusive of children and families with a diverse range of needs and abilities, welcoming and culturally safe for all families, and support Aboriginal children to have a strong sense of identity and culture.

3-year-old preschool frequently asked questions

For families and communities

3-year-old preschool is rolling out in South Australia from 2026 to 2032, starting in the long day care sector across the state, and in government and other sessional preschools in regional areas.

Why is the government focusing on early learning?

Research tells us that investing in the early years pays the biggest dividends for children and society. More than 90% of a child's brain development occurs before the age of 5. There is broad evidence that 3- and 4-year-olds who attend preschool programs have better life outcomes. This investment is key to reducing the rate of South Australian children entering school developmentally vulnerable – from 23.8% to 15% over 20 years.

Why is 3-year-old preschool rolling out in stages?

A staged approach is required to build up the necessary supply of qualified teachers and educators and, in some cases, create more infrastructure.

From 2026 to 2032, you will see early childhood education and care services progressively begin to offer a universal teacher-led preschool program for 3-year-olds.

Services will offer preschool programs of between 6 and 15 hours during the roll-out, based on their capacity, with all children able to access a 15-hour program by 2032.

When will my community have access?

Long day care services that meet the workforce and quality requirements will be among the first to deliver universal 3-year-old preschool programs. This makes sense, because more than 60% of 3-year-olds are already in long day care. Long day care services that are ready to deliver in 2026 will be confirmed by mid-2025. More long day care services will join in future years, as the workforce grows.

Government and non-government sessional preschools (sometimes called kindergartens) will also phase in the availability of 3-year-old preschool places from 2026. This will start with rural and regional communities, before moving on to other parts of the state. This means that areas with limited access to early childhood education and care will be prioritised in the early stages of the roll-out.

From mid-2025, there will be a directory on the Office for Early Childhood Development website that will include all services offering universal 3-year-old preschool in 2026.

For more information, see www.earlychildhood.sa.gov.au/3-year-old-preschool-roll-out

What are the differences between 3-year-old and 4-year-old preschool programs?

3-year-old preschool programs provide an extra year of age-appropriate, play-based learning that can boost a child's development in their pivotal years before school.

Following the recommendations of the South Australian Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, if your child attends a long day care service funded to deliver 3-year-old preschool, they will receive their program there. You cannot be enrolled in another funded 3-year-old preschool program at the same time.

This is different from 4-year-old preschool. All children will continue to be eligible for a place in 4-year-old preschool in a government service, regardless of whether they are enrolled in a long day care service on other days.

Aboriginal children, and children in out-of-home care, were already eligible for 12 hours of 3-year-old preschool at government services and in 2024 this increased to 15 hours. This will continue to be an entitlement for these children, regardless of other services they may be enrolled in.

How are you ensuring quality?

We're investing in 3-year-old preschool programs to contribute to South Australia's strong reputation for quality early learning. This includes supporting early childhood teachers to have more planning time (above the Award) and professional learning, and support to lift the quality of services that need it. Services will also have access to quality curriculum resources and connections to allied health and other supports for children and families.

How old does my child need to be to start?

3-year-old preschool is designed to be 2 years before your child starts school, after your child's 3rd birthday. In mid-2025 a preschool start date calculator will be available on the Office for Early Childhood Development website.

What will 3-year-old preschool cost my family?

Long day care 3-year-old programs suit families who need longer days of early childhood education and require services that operate for at least 48 weeks a year. That's why more than 60% of 3-year-olds in South Australia are already in long day care.

If you attend a long day care preschool program, you can still claim the Commonwealth Childcare Subsidy (CCS) as you normally would for your preschool hours.

You can check your CCS eligibility and what your fees might be at startingblocks.gov.au/child-care-subsidy-calculator

The state government's investment will fund a new preschool model, which includes a new early learning program for your 3-year-old child that is:

- teacher-led
- gives services access to funding to support connection with allied health and services
- provides for planning time and professional development for teachers to help them deliver quality preschool programs.

By partnering with the government to deliver 3-year-old preschool, funded long day care services will not need to raise their fees to offer you and your child this higher quality program.



For government and non-government sessional services that do not receive the Commonwealth CCS, fees will be set by the provider, usually on a by-term basis. Families generally receive the 15-hour preschool program over 2 or 3 days a week, for 40 weeks a year.

What else is changing in early childhood?

The children most in need will get access to 30 hours of preschool a week. We're setting up integrated hubs, so families and children are supported to get the help they need in one place. Demonstration sites will open by the end of 2025 in Port Pirie and Adelaide's northern suburbs.

We're investing in Aboriginal families with additional funding in Aboriginal children's outcomes, through a co-design process with Community.

We're also investing \$96 million to develop and support the early childhood workforce, invest in quality teaching and learning, and further enable the critical quality work of the Education Standards Board.

Where can I find out more?

Find out more about the 3-year-old preschool roll-out and early childhood reforms at www.earlychildhood.sa.gov.au