

	Policy	
	Service Delivery	
	Priority of Access for Enrolments and Attendances to SDN long day care centres during COVID19 and the Early Childhood Education and Care Relief Package 2020	SD-HLP-2.01

Rationale

SDN believes that all children have a right to apply to access and participate in our services; and SDN recognises that at certain times people face barriers that make accessing services difficult, and therefore experience disadvantage leading to inequality. SDN also recognises that as a result of past and ongoing experiences of colonisation Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities experience particular disadvantage.

Equal rights to access are a commitment to social justice and fairness demonstrated by identifying barriers and implementing strategies that overcome these barriers and address inequality.

This policy outlines SDN’s approach to prioritising applications for places in our long day care services for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated Early Childhood Education and Care Relief Package.

Background to interim Amendment to this Policy

On 2 April 2020, the Australian Government announced the Early Childhood Education and Care Relief Package. The Australian Government’s primary aim is to support services to remain open to ensure that quality early childhood education and care continues to be available to support essential workers and disadvantaged and vulnerable children and families.

From Monday 6 April 2020 weekly payments are being made directly to early childhood education and care services in lieu of the Child Care Subsidy and the Additional Child Care Subsidy, to help the services to keep their doors open and employees in their jobs.

In return for receiving payments, services are required to:

- stay open unless closed on public health advice or for other health and safety reasons
- ensure families are not charged a fee, including an out of pocket or gap* fee
- **prioritise care to essential workers, vulnerable and disadvantaged children**
- continue to record attendance of children
- comply with all other provider obligations including National Quality Framework and other relevant conditions of approval under Family Assistance Law.

Payments to SDN will be calculated to be 50 per cent of the lower of the services’ hourly fees or the existing hourly rate cap, based on the fortnight before 2 March 2020. The 50% payment combined with the requirement to not charge a gap fee to families, and with the advice to have 4 square metres of unencumbered indoor space per person (children and adults) has led to SDN needing to

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reduce the maximum number of children and staff that each SDN centre can accommodate at any one time.

To manage this reduced capacity, we are applying an interim amendment to our priority of access policy.

This interim policy temporarily amends the existing approved policy SD-HLP-2.01 Priority of Access to SDN Services and remains in place while the Early Childhood Education and Care Relief Package remains active. The ECEC Relief Package commenced on 6 April 2020 and will continue until at least the week ending 28 June 2020, and possibly longer subject to review.

Scope

This interim policy, and its associated documents, applies to SDN’s Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) centres (long day care).

Key Terms

Eligibility for access

Means a person has met specific required conditions that relate to a specific service. To apply and to be considered for a place, eligibility criteria must be met. To have access to SDN services, children and/or families must be eligible. This means satisfying the specific conditions that apply to each service type.

Priority of access

Means the order in which eligible applicants for places are offered places in SDN services.

Vulnerable child

A child who would normally qualify for Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS) under Child Wellbeing (CW) or Temporary Financial Hardship (TFH).

Policy

Priority of access decisions will sit within the context of SDN’s Pathways Approach from first contact with SDN through to transition out of SDN, as well as pathways within SDN.

Information about eligibility criteria and SDN Priority of Access criteria will be made available to families and other service providers working with families.

Only eligible children/families can have an application for a place considered.

All eligible families that apply for access to an SDN service will have their application assessed against SDN Priority of Access criteria. All offers of a place in SDN services will strictly adhere to the SDN Priority of Access criteria.

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All services will follow the SDN *Priority of Access Procedure* at all times when offering places, including in circumstances when a waiting list is required. This procedure has been developed to ensure the service complies with relevant State/Territory and Federal laws and regulations.

No child is placed on a waiting list under any circumstances before having their Priority level assessed and evidenced.

Children who meet the criteria for Priority1 (a child identified as being at risk of harm) will **not** be placed onto a waiting list. They will be supported to access an appropriate service, whether this is an SDN service or a non-SDN service.

Teams around a child will be formed to support access to SDN services when families are facing particular challenges.

Enrolment

Enrolment is the formal agreement between SDN and a family or carer detailing the terms under which a child has a place held for them for when the relief package ends and Child Care Subsidy and applicable rules are reinstated.

While enrolment is a prerequisite for attendance, enrolment **does not** automatically lead to a right to attend while the Relief Package applies.

We encourage families to remain enrolled and eligible for the Child Care Subsidy in order to be well-placed for when Child Care Subsidy is reinstated.

This includes:

- continuing to care for their child at least 14% of the time
- meeting immunisation requirements
- telling Services Australia if they have a change in circumstances.

While the Relief Package is in place families whose children are enrolled and not attending will not be charged any fee if their child is absent. Once the Relief Package is ended, enrolled children will have priority over newly enrolling children.

Attendance

Attendance refers to the regular sessions (usually nominated days of the week) that SDN has confirmed an enrolled child to be present in the centre and receive education and care. Approved attendances will be managed to ensure the centre meets the Australian Government's priorities of access and adherence to social distancing principles to ensure 4m² of space available to each individual (adult and child) on site. Enrolment is a prerequisite to attendance.

Families whose children are enrolled can apply to attend an SDN centre.

An attendance application is used to assess their priority for attendance.

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SDN reserves the right to refuse attendance to a child who has not had an attendance application accepted and who has not had an attendance offer from SDN.

Attendance places are offered based on the following priority of access:

1.	Children of essential workers who were attending as at 6 April 2020
2.	Children who were eligible for Additional Childcare Subsidy (Child Wellbeing /Temporary Financial Hardship) who were attending as at 6 April 2020
3.	Children of families enrolled but not attending as at 6 April 2020, including families who have given notice of termination of enrolment but not yet terminated
4	New enrolments for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essential services workers • Vulnerable children and/or • Children who would have been eligible for ACCS (CW/TFH)
5	Other

SDN will discuss requests to attend with each family as appropriate, however while the Relief Package is in place and social distancing principles apply, SDN cannot guarantee that a child will be able to attend a particular centre even if they are enrolled.

SDN's offers of attendance places are final.

Related SDN Documents

Policies

- GI-HLP-1.04: Equity, Social Justice and Social Inclusion
- GI-HLP-1.05: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement

Relevant Legislation/Regulations

- Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992
- Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986
- Racial Discrimination Act 1975
- Racial Hatred Act 1995
- A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999 (*or equivalent*)
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010

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- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
 - Schedule 1: National Quality Standard, elements 6.1.1, 6.3.3 and 7.3.2

Other References/Related Documents

- Department of Education – <http://education.gov.au/>
- NSW Department of Education – Start Strong Community Preschool Guidelines
 - Child Care Service Handbook 2012-2013 for all Child Care Benefit approved child care services operating under the Child Care Management System (CCMS)
 - <http://education.gov.au/priority-allocating-places>

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