
B Current assistance measures

This appendix provides information on the Australian Government's current key assistance payments and programs for early childhood education and care (ECEC) including:

- Child Care Benefit (CCB)
- Child Care Rebate (CCR)
- Jobs, Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance (JETCCFA)
- Community Support Programme (CSP)
- Budget Based Funded (BBF) Programme
- Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP)
- Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY)
- Family Tax Benefit (FTB).

B.1 Payments and programs for ECEC

Child Care Benefit

To be eligible to receive CCB families must use CCB approved or registered care and meet residency and immunisation requirements and an income test. The amount of CCB received depends on the number of hours of CCB the family can access and their hourly CCB rate.

The number of hours of CCB that can be accessed depends on whether the family is using approved or registered care and how many hours parents are participating in work-related commitments.

- Eligible families who are using approved care can receive CCB for up to 24 hours per child per week. To claim more than 24 hours and up to a maximum of 50 hours of CCB per week, parents must meet the Work, Training, Study Test (box B.1).
- Eligible families who are using registered care can access up to 50 hours of CCB per child per week if they meet the Work, Training, Study Test but no minimum number of hours of work-related commitments are required (Department of Education 2013f). In certain circumstances, more than 50 hours of CCB per child per week can be claimed.

Box B.1 **Work, Training, Study Test**

The Work, Training, Study Test (the Test) is used to determine how many hours of CCB can be claimed. It is also used to determine eligibility for the CCR and priority for vacancies in the priority of access guidelines.

To meet the Test for *approved care* (and claim between 24 and 50 hours of CCB per week) each parent must have work-related commitments of at least 15 hours per week or 30 hours a fortnight or have an exemption. For *registered care*, families need to participate in work-related commitments at some time during the week (no minimum hours are required) or have an exemption.

Work-related commitments include:

- paid work or self-employment
- setting up a business
- training or studying
- looking for work
- voluntary work to improve work skills.

The Test can also be satisfied if the CCB recipient is:

- on annual leave, long service leave, sick leave or other paid leave
- on paid or unpaid parental leave for a maximum of 12 months for a single parent or combined leave for both parents
- on self-employment leave
- receiving Carer Payment or Carer Allowance
- caring for a person with a disability or on carer leave or carer sick leave.

Exemptions to the Test include grandparents with primary care for the grandchild, a parent who has a disability (the other parent must still meet the Test), a parent who is overseas or in prison or parents that are facing exceptional circumstances.

Exceptional circumstances are short-term family crises that result in the parent, and their partner (if they have one) being unable to care for their child for a period longer than 24 hours per week. Exceptional circumstances include, but are not limited to:

- hospitalisation
- short term: physical incapacity; episodes of psychological or psychiatric illness; or carer responsibilities for other family members
- serious illness of a sibling
- intensive medical treatment
- voluntary work in an emergency or disaster, such as bush fires, storms or floods
- out of town travel associated with: attendance at a funeral or bereavement; or resolution of a family member's estate
- jury duty or appearance as a witness.

Source: Department of Education (2013g).

The rate of CCB per hour that each family receives is primarily dependent upon whether the family is using an approved or registered service provider, family income, the number of children in care and whether or not the child(ren) are attending school (described here as either school or non-school children).

- Eligible CCB families using approved care with incomes of \$41 902 or less (in 2013-14) are entitled to the maximum CCB payment rate. This rate varies according to how many children are in approved care. For example, for one non-school child in approved care the maximum amount of CCB (for 2013-14) is \$3.99 per hour or \$199.50 for 50 hours of care. Table B.1 shows maximum CCB rates for families using CCB approved services by number of non-school children in care.
- As income increases above \$41 902 the rate of CCB decreases until income limits are reached. Again, these limits vary according to the number of children in approved care. For example, if a family has one non-school child in approved care the family income limit for qualifying for CCB is \$145 642 (table B.1). CCB maximum rates and income thresholds are indexed with the Consumer Price Index each year (Department of Education 2013b).
- Eligible families using registered care are entitled to a CCB payment of \$0.66 an hour for a non-school child up to a maximum of \$33.30 for 50 hours of care per week per child. For registered care users, family income does not affect the hourly rate of CCB (Department of Education 2013e).

Table B.1 Maximum payments and family income limits, CCB^a
2013-14

<i>Children in CCB approved care</i>	<i>Maximum amount of CCB for 50 hours of care</i>	<i>Maximum amount of CCB per hour</i>	<i>Income limit (CCB is not available over this limit)</i>
Number	\$	\$	\$
One	199.50	3.99	145 642
Two	416.92	4.16	150 914
Three	650.57	4.33	170 404
Each additional child	216.85	4.33	32 219

^a The rates provided are for children not attending school (or non-school children).

Source: Department of Education (2013b).

There are a number of other factors that may influence the rate of CCB entitlement including:

- rates for school children are 85 per cent of the non-school child rates
- a higher part-time loading percentage applies to non-school children attending a long day care (LDC) service for less than 38 hours a week
- a higher standard hourly rate applies to children attending family day care (FDC) and In-Home Care services for less than 37.5 hours a week

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- a higher non-standard hourly rate applies to children attending FDC and In-Home Care services for any hours outside the service's standard hours.

Box B.2 **Special Child Care Benefit**

SCCB is available for a period of up to 13 weeks

Under family assistance law, directors of approved childcare services can grant up to 13 weeks of Special Child Care Benefit (SCCB) in a financial year for a child in their care if they believe a child is at risk of serious abuse or neglect or if a family is experiencing temporary financial hardship which has reduced their ability to pay childcare fees. Hardship includes natural disasters and/or periods of local emergency. Services should be satisfied that all individuals being approved for SCCB meet the criteria for a child at risk or hardship. The decision to grant SCCB cannot be appealed.

SCCB can be extended for longer than 13 weeks but certain conditions apply

If a child needs more than 13 weeks of SCCB, the service provider can apply to the Department of Human Services for an extension of SCCB.

- For SCCB for a child at risk, the service must make a claim on behalf of the family, stating the reasons why the child is at risk and how long SCCB will be required. Evidence provided by childcare services may range from observations of the child's behaviour to assessments from welfare and health professionals.
- The minimum supporting documentation required by the Department of Human Services (DHS) to receive extra periods of SCCB for hardship is a statutory declaration outlining the circumstances and providing details of the period of local emergency. Extended SCCB assistance is considered for periods of up to 13 weeks on each application.

And there are some limits on the granting of SCCB

There is no limit on the total number of weeks of SCCB which can be provided where a child remains at risk of serious abuse or neglect. However, there is a 52 week limit for SCCB provided to assist a family in relation to a single hardship event.

There are also limits on the proportion of care for which services can approve SCCB. The total amount of SCCB (for both 'child at risk' and 'hardship') that a service can approve in one quarter is normally limited to 18 per cent of the total CCB paid to the service in the quarter before last. If a service reaches this 18 per cent SCCB approval limit, any further SCCB must be obtained either by the service successfully applying to the Department of Education for a higher approval limit or by seeking approval of individual applications by the DHS.

All families who are eligible for CCB receive up to 24 hours of CCB a week or up to 50 hours of CCB a week if they meet the Work, Training, Study Test (or they have an exemption). A service provider can approve an increase in the CCB hourly limit for SCCB for children who are at risk. However, SCCB granted for financial hardship is restricted to the weekly limit for CCB. However, SCCB can be paid for a period of 24-hour care if exceptional circumstances apply that warrant 24 hour care.

Services cannot claim both the SCCB rate and JETCCFA for a child at the same session of care. When a family is receiving JETCCFA and a service approves SCCB for the family (or when a family is receiving SCCB and becomes eligible for JETCCFA) SCCB takes priority.

Source: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2012).

There are also two sub categories of CCB which target specific circumstances.

- Special Child Care Benefit (SCCB) supports a child at risk of serious abuse or neglect or a family experiencing temporary financial hardship. Claims are assessed every three months but the benefit is not intended to be an ongoing support payment (sub. 147, p. 38 and box B.2).
- Grandparent Child Care Benefit (GCCB) is provided to eligible grandparents who have primary care of a child and receive an income support payment. GCCB recipients do not have to meet the Work, Training, Study Test. GCCB pays full fees for each child in approved childcare for up to 50 hours per child per week. GCCB can only be claimed as reduced fees and is paid directly to the ECEC provider (Department of Education 2013b).

Families receiving CCB for approved care can elect to have the payment as a lump sum or as reduced childcare fees. Families using registered ECEC can receive CCB from the Department of Human Services by presenting childcare fee receipts together with a claim form within 12 months from when the care was provided (Department of Education 2014a).

Child Care Rebate

To be eligible for CCR, parents have to participate in work-related commitments at some time during the week or have an exemption (box B.1) and be using a CCB approved service. There is no CCR for families using registered care.

CCR is not means tested. If families are eligible for CCB but their CCB entitlement is zero (because their income is higher than the thresholds) they may be eligible for CCR.

CCR provides up to 50 per cent of a family's out-of-pocket childcare costs after any CCB is deducted, up to a maximum of \$7500 per child per year. Parents can elect to receive CCR on a fortnightly, quarterly or annual basis or have it paid directly to their ECEC provider as a fee reduction.

Jobs, Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance

To qualify for JETCCFA families must qualify for the maximum rate of CCB.

JETCCFA currently includes up to 24 hours of assistance per child per week while the recipient is undertaking an approved activity. To access more than 24 hours of JETCCFA a week, up to a maximum of 50 hours per week, the recipient must be undertaking at least 15 hours of approved JETCCFA activities a week. JETCCA activities include:

- searching for a job — up to 20 days in 20 weeks
- paid and unpaid work — for the initial 26 weeks of a job

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- study or training — for up to 24 months
 - participating in a labour market program — for example, the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program, Work for the Dole and Green Corps
 - participating in a Government-funded rehabilitation program
 - other activities that help parents engage in sustainable paid work (Department of Education 2013d).

JETCCFA currently pays most of the childcare gap fee (the difference between the full fee and CCB). All parents receiving JETCCFA pay a small contribution (\$1 per hour of care) to the cost of the care they attend. However, the Australian Government's 2014-15 Budget announced two changes to this payment rate and to the maximum number of hours that JETCCFA can be claimed. From 5 January 2015:

- JETCCFA will be capped to a maximum amount of \$8.00 per hour per child
- JETCCFA will be paid up to a maximum of 36 hours per week per child for parents doing approved study activities. However, no changes have been made to hourly limits of other JETCCFA activities such as work activities (Department of Human Services 2014).

JETCCFA is paid directly to ECEC services. Families receiving JETCCFA may also be eligible for CCR. Families requiring JETCCFA must apply directly to the Department of Human Services (Department of Education 2013d).

Community Support Programme

The CSP is part of the broader Child Care Services Support Program (CCSSP) and provides a range of payments directly to eligible childcare service providers with the aim of improving access to childcare, especially in areas where the market or services might otherwise be unviable. The CSP offers a range of payments dependent on the type of childcare service, its size and location.

- **Set Up Assistance** is a one-off payment to contribute to an approved FDC, In-Home Care and outside school hours care (OSHC) service's set-up costs when establishing the new service. It is available to both for-profit and not-for-profit service providers.
- **Sustainability Assistance** is funding to support approved LDC and OSHC providers deliver services in areas where the operation of a service is unlikely to be viable without additional assistance. The payment provides a contribution to the daily costs of operating the service. (FDC Sustainability Assistance is an older model of childcare service funding assistance that is no longer available to new applicants.)
- **Operational Support** is funding to support approved FDC, In-Home Care and Occasional Care providers with the ongoing, day to day costs of delivering quality, affordable childcare.

- **Regional Travel Assistance** is a support payment designed to assist FDC services and In-Home Care with the travel costs incurred by coordination staff for journeys undertaken in order to support the service’s network of educators (Department of Education 2014d).
- the **Long Day Care Capital Funding Exceptional Circumstances Grant** provides individual one-off discretionary grants of up to \$500 000 to eligible LDC providers (box B.3) (Department of Education 2014e).

Box B.3 Long Day Care Capital Funding Exceptional Circumstances Grant

The Long Day Care (LDC) Capital Funding Exceptional Circumstances Grant (the Grant) provides individual one-off discretionary grants of up to \$500 000 to assist communities in rural or remote locations experiencing documented unmet demand for services (Department of Education 2014e).

Providers seeking funding must demonstrate that they have considered all viable alternative childcare options, including non-centre based care options. To be eligible, providers must be:

- CCB approved or eligible to be CCB approved
- eligible for LDC Sustainability Assistance funding under the Community Support Programme (CSP)
- located in an area identified as ‘Outer Regional’, ‘Remote’ or ‘Very Remote’ as determined by the Department of Education
- an existing (or intending) provider of centre-based LDC in an area of need identified by the Department of Education, where there is evidence of market failure or facing difficulties in expanding facilities to operate centre-based LDC, with documented evidence of unmet demand.

The Grant assists eligible regional and remote communities to:

- expand or extend existing facilities to enable them to continue to operate a centre-based LDC or construct a facility to provide centre-based LDC
- develop innovative solutions such as co-locating childcare with the school to increase community access to childcare.

Requests for funding under the Grant are assessed on a case-by-case basis by the Department of Education. Not all eligible applicants are able to receive a grant as funding is limited.

Source: Department of Education (2014e).

CSP eligibility and the amount of funding each service receives is determined by a number of factors including type of service (LDC, OSHC, FDC, In-Home Care or Occasional Care), remoteness category, level of socioeconomic disadvantage and the number of children attending the service. CSP payment rates are available on the Australian Government Department of Education’s website (Department of Education 2014b).

From 1 July 2015, all FDC providers applying for CSP funding will be assessed under similar eligibility criteria to those which apply to other care types (LDC and OSHC). FDC providers will only be eligible for CSP funding if they are the sole provider of FDC in the surrounding area, and if they provide care in regional, remote or disadvantaged areas where there is unmet demand for childcare. At the same time, a yearly cap of \$250 000 on CSP Operational Support payments will be introduced for FDC services (Department of Education 2014c).

Budget Based Funded Programme

The BBF Programme is a discretionary grant program. The total amount of funds available for the Program is limited and the decision to offer funding to existing recipients is reviewed at the end of each financial year, at which point existing recipients may or may not be offered further funding (Department of Education 2013a).

The purpose of the BBF Programme is to help services with the cost of operating an ECEC service. Funding is intended to be an operational subsidy; it is a contribution towards the operating costs of a service and is not intended to be at the exclusion of other sources of funding (such as state, territory or local government funding and fees from parents).

The funding agreement sets out the rights, responsibilities and obligations of the Australian Government and the BBF recipient. A service work plan and budget is required under the funding agreement.

BBF services may only receive CCB on behalf of families if authorised by the Department of Education. Recipients of BBF Programme funding are required under the funding agreement to establish a fee setting and collection policy based on the principle that families with the capacity to pay should contribute to the cost of the service (Department of Education 2013a). As a result, fee policies vary across BBF services depending on the profile of the local community. Some BBF services do not charge fees, while others charge minimal fees or market rates.

The BBF Quality Measure supports improvements in the quality of facilities, improvements in the qualifications of staff and strengthening the governance and administrative capacity of services.

Inclusion and Professional Support Program

The objective of the IPSP is to promote and maintain high quality, inclusive education and care for all children in eligible ECEC settings by increasing the knowledge and skills of educators and the capacity of services by providing professional development and support including advice and access to resources. The following principles underpin the delivery of the IPSP.

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- Equity of access — eligible ECEC services, regardless of their geographic location or service type, have equitable access to support provided by the IPSP.
 - Inclusion — the IPSP supports eligible ECEC services to be inclusive of all children.
 - Professional workforce — the IPSP supports an increase in the professional qualifications of the ECEC workforce, and is proactive in meeting the needs of the ECEC workforce and ECEC service management.
 - Quality — the Program assists eligible ECEC services to understand quality by actively promoting the National Quality Framework, the Early Years Learning Framework and the Framework for School Age Care.
 - National consistency — eligible ECEC services have access to Program services that are delivered in an efficient, flexible, culturally appropriate and timely manner.
 - Integrated approach — IPSP providers work collaboratively with each other and develop organisational relationships that support an integrated approach to service delivery.
 - Capacity building and a strengths-based approach — IPSP providers use a strengths-based approach (that is, understanding the capacity and capability of the ECEC service as a starting point for determining the type and intensity of assistance and support required) to build the capacity of services to continuously improve the quality of their environment (Department of Education 2013c).

The IPSP comprises two elements — Inclusion Support as well as Professional Development and Support. Inclusion Support improves access and inclusion for children with additional needs and is provided by Inclusion Support Agencies (ISAs), the National Inclusion Support Subsidy Provider and through access to the Inclusion Support Subsidy (ISS), Flexible Support Funding, Bicultural Support, and Specialised Equipment. Professional Development and Support raises the quality of the education and care provided in ECEC settings and this support is provided by Professional Support Coordinators (PSCs) and Indigenous Professional Support Units.

Inclusion Support Agencies

ISAs are funded across 67 regions to provide eligible ECEC services with support to build the capacity of services to provide quality inclusive environments for children with additional needs. For the purposes of the IPSP, children with additional needs are those from the following priority groups:

- children with disability, including children with ongoing high support needs
- children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- children from a refugee or humanitarian intervention background
- Indigenous children.

ISAs have a number of responsibilities including:

- assisting eligible ECEC services to access IPSP support and resources as appropriate, including the ISS Flexible Support Funding, Bicultural Support, Specialist Equipment and professional development (discussed below)
- employing Inclusion Support Facilitators (ISFs) to work at the local level with ECEC services and ensuring that ISFs have ongoing support and access to training to assist them to successfully undertake their role
- developing an ISA Region Plan, which documents how inclusion support will be promoted, coordinated and delivered to eligible ECEC services within the region
- working in collaboration with Indigenous Professional Support Units to assist mainstream ECEC services to become culturally sensitive, and inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families
- sharing information and materials with other ISAs and other IPSP providers where appropriate (Department of Education 2013c).

Inclusion Support Subsidy

The ISS is demand driven but managed within a capped allocation. ISAs and the National Inclusion Support Subsidy Provider are responsible for monitoring the use of ISS to ensure it is targeted appropriately to assist children with ongoing high support needs to be included in eligible ECEC services. ISS funding is carefully monitored, and if demand is expected to exceed the budget allocation, measures are put in place to manage funding. Measures could include increasing the budget allocation, or waitlisting applications until funds become available. This means that even if services meet the eligibility requirements, they are not guaranteed to receive the ISS.

The ISS rate (indexed annually) and its hourly limit is dependent on service type.

- For LDC, Occasional Care and flexible/innovative services, the ISS is \$16.92 an hour for up to 25 hours per week, 52 weeks of the year.
- For FDC and In-Home Care, there is a tier one subsidy of \$4.49 an hour or tier two subsidy of \$9 an hour for up to 50 hours per week. Tier one is defined as the impact of caring for the child has a ‘mild impact on the carer’ and tier two is when the child has a ‘significant impact’ on the carer’s capacity to include the child in the service.
- For Before School Care, the ISS is \$16.92 an hour for up to 10 hours per week for 42 weeks a year.
- For After School Care, the ISS is \$16.92 an hour for up to 15 hours per week for 42 weeks a year.
- For Vacation Care, the rate of ISS is \$16.92 an hour for up to 40 hours per week, 12 weeks of the year (Department of Education 2013c).

The development of a Service Support Plan is required for a service to access ISS (box B.4). ISS is underpinned by conditions of funding (agreed to by ECEC services) which are based on relevant criteria and vary in duration to a maximum of 52 weeks.

The National Inclusion Support Subsidy Provider (currently KU Children’s Services) can approve a subsidy for up to 6 months for eligible children undergoing continuous disability assessment and for up to 12 months for a child with assessed/diagnosed disability or a child from a refugee or humanitarian intervention background.

CCB approved ECEC services can apply for ISS online through the *IS Portal*. BBF services apply for ISS using a paper-based application process. ISS is paid directly to centre-based services. In the case of FDC and In-Home Care, the payment is made to the FDC scheme or sponsors of the In-Home Care service, who in turn make the payment directly to the service.

Box B.4 Service Support Plan

The development of a Service Support Plan is a prerequisite to receive inclusion support, applying for Inclusion Subsidy Support or Flexible Support Funding.

There are three key sections to the Service Support Plan:

- Service Information — includes ECEC service and Inclusion Support Agency details
- Service Review — includes issues and dynamics that impact on the ECEC service
- Staff Capacity Building Plan — includes staff need, team goals, resources available to support goal implementation, an action plan, progress and future directions.

In developing the Service Support Plan, the ECEC service examines their care environment and their staff’s capacity to include a child or children with additional or high support needs. The Service Support Plan identifies:

- the impact on the environment, and will need to change to enable them to support a child’s (or children’s) access to the service and engagement in all aspects of the program
- modifications to policy, pedagogy, planning, activities and the physical environment, including social play
- how staff will engage with the family and any relevant organisations
- new knowledge, training or supports that are required in the area of inclusion
- goals that will guide all staff in the environment
- internal and external capacity building opportunities, including other Inclusion and Professional Support Program supports
- actions the service will implement to meet the goals, policies and practices the ECEC service might adopt to support inclusion.

Source: Department of Education (2013c).

Flexible Support Funding

Flexible Support Funding is a subsidy administered by ISAs to enable ECEC services to be more responsive to families and children with additional needs. Flexible Support Funding can be used to assist a service to include a child with high support needs where it is unclear whether the ISS is required on an ongoing basis. Services that support a child with short-term additional needs or ongoing high support needs (but the child attends the service on an occasional or irregular basis), may apply for Flexible Support Funding. To be eligible, the ECEC service must have already enrolled a child with additional needs.

Approved purposes for Flexible Support Funding include:

- assisting ECEC services to include a child with ongoing high support needs where it is unclear whether the ISS is required on an ongoing basis
- enabling release time for permanent educators to settle a child with ongoing high support needs into the ECEC environment — for example, a child who is transferring to a new care environment or type of provider (such as from LDC to OSHC)
- enabling release time for permanent educators to attend specialist training that is relevant to the inclusion of a child with additional needs
- enabling release time for permanent educators to prepare a Service Support Plan to support the inclusion of a child with additional needs
- providing a financial contribution to FDC educators and In-Home Care carers unable to attend specialist training. Specialist training must relate specifically to the additional needs of the child in care
- providing home based educators with an additional carer so that a child or children with additional needs who attends on an irregular basis can participate in out-of-home excursions or other special activities (for example, playgroups or vacation care excursions)
- assisting services to include a child with additional needs in circumstances where attendance may be irregular and an application for the ISS may not be appropriate (for example, in occasional care, Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Services, flexible/innovative services or mobile services)
- assisting services in circumstances where the ISS has already been approved, but an emergency situation has resulted in the child requiring additional hours of care for a time-limited period (Department of Education 2013c).

The primary role of educators employed using Flexible Support Funding is to increase the staff-to-child ratio in the ECEC service for a time limited period. This enables services to quickly respond to their own needs and those of families of children with additional needs. It is also used to allow staff to attend training specific to the additional needs of the child in care or to prepare a Service Support Plan to identify inclusion needs. Any educator funded by Flexible Support Funding must be in addition to the number of educators required by licensing or regulatory requirements.

Educators support all children in the service, and all educators in the service may be involved in providing support to the child with additional needs. Educators employed using Flexible Support Funding do not:

- assist the child with additional needs on a one-to-one basis
- provide specialist assistance (for example, medical assistance or physiotherapy)
- provide support that would otherwise be provided by the Inclusion Support Agency.

Flexible Support Funding is not intended to cover all additional employee costs, but does provide a significant contribution to these costs. Flexible Support Funding is a flat hourly rate (aligned with the ISS) that is indexed on 1 July each year. Limits apply to the number of daily and annual hours of Flexible Support Funding an ECEC service can access. These limits vary according to service type and activity.

- For LDC, Occasional Care, Before and After School Care and flexible/innovative services the hourly rate is \$16.92 with a daily cap of 5 hours for a maximum of 100 hours each year for each eligible child.
- For FDC and In-Home Care the rate is \$16.92 an hour, with a weekly cap of 5 hours for a maximum of 5 weeks each year for each eligible child.
- For Vacation Care, the hourly rate is \$16.92 with a daily cap of 8 hours for a maximum of 80 hours each year for each eligible child.
- In addition, for all service types, Flexible Support Funding for specialist training is limited to 15 hours per service each year (Department of Education 2013c).

Bicultural Support

Bicultural Support provides eligible ECEC services with access to an interpreter or other bilingual/bicultural person to support the service to enrol and settle a child from culturally and linguistically diverse, Indigenous, refugee or humanitarian intervention backgrounds (Department of Education 2013c).

Eligible ECEC services can make requests for Bicultural Support through the ISA, PSC or Indigenous Professional Support Unit (IPSU). The request must be accompanied by a Service Support Plan and include the consent of the relevant parent, carer, or ECEC professional (other than the educator). However, as Bicultural Support must be responsive, and to avoid delays, the decision to approve the request can proceed before the PSC receives the completed Service Support Plan.

PSCs are responsible for ensuring that eligible ECEC services can access Bicultural Support free of charge and for building and maintaining networks in the region to source suitable agencies or persons able to provide the type of support required. When an eligible service requests Bicultural Support in relation to the enrolment and settlement of an Indigenous child(ren), the PSC contacts the IPSU to either directly provide the bilingual/bicultural advice or support required (on a fee for service basis); or advise of an

alternative contact in the local area that may be able to meet the specific need of the eligible ECEC service. Where an appropriately skilled interpreter, bilingual or bicultural person is not available to visit in person, support can be provided via phone or other technologies, such as Skype.

The funding allocations for Bicultural Support are determined before each financial year commences and paid to the PSCs. Assistance provided by the interpreter, bilingual or bicultural person under Bicultural Support funding may include:

- facilitating communication between eligible ECEC services and culturally diverse families and children, for example by, interpreting meetings between parents and educators, providing verbal translation of enrolment documents, and providing educators with key words and phrases that can be used to communicate with the child
- facilitating cultural awareness by assisting eligible ECEC services to better understand particular ethnic backgrounds, cultural experiences, and child rearing practices of the children and families
- supporting curricula or programming by advising on culturally inclusive curriculum and resources that support the development of English as a second language and assist newly arrived children and families from refugee backgrounds
- supporting community linkages by providing educators with information, where available, about relevant community resources and services to support the inclusion of culturally diverse children and families (Department of Education 2013c).

Specialist equipment

Specialist equipment is available on loan from the PSC to eligible ECEC services (excluding In-Home Care) to assist the inclusion of a child who has demonstrated ongoing high support needs in an ECEC environment.

The specialist equipment includes, but is not limited to:

- portable ramps to create access to the environment
- standing frames and full support swings to allow a child with high physical support needs to participate in the daily childcare program and activities
- hoists, slings, harnesses, change tables, toilet seats or steps, potty chairs, mobile stools and seating or posture aids to help educators provide basic care functions
- specialised ‘basic furniture’, such as chairs, tables, desks and sleeping equipment
- communication cards or charts, and Auslan dictionaries to assist communication between the child and educators
- specialised inclusion toys, such as switch sensory mats
- individualised equipment, such as foam items, specific to the needs of a child’s care environment and a child being included (Department of Education 2013c).

To borrow specialist equipment an eligible ECEC service must submit a Service Support Plan and a Specialist Equipment Request Form (completed by a qualified professional, such as an occupational therapist or physiotherapist). Equipment is loaned for as long as it is required. Where equipment is available, non-eligible ECEC services can hire equipment on a full cost recovery basis.

The PSC purchases new equipment in line with IPSP Funding Agreements but must seek prior approval from the Department of Education for equipment costing \$5000 or more (Department of Education 2013c).

Professional development and support

PSCs deliver and/or facilitate professional development and support and resources to assist educators in providing a high quality service as defined by the National Quality Standards. This support is to assist services in developing strategies that are sustainable in the longer term.

PSCs are required to develop a plan, in consultation with the Department of Education (as specified in the Funding Agreement) as to how professional development and support will be promoted, coordinated and delivered to all eligible ECEC service types across the state/territory and within Inclusion Support Agency regions, including in remote areas. Professional development and support under the IPSP includes:

- accredited and non-accredited courses
- conversations and informal sessions
- events, forums, hubs and networks
- collaborative projects
- mentoring and coaching
- advice and information
- access to information/resources.

PSCs (in consultation with the Department of Education) are required to develop calendars of training and courses and promote them within their state or territory. Each PSC:

- maintains a 1800 phone line to provide eligible ECEC services with access to a PSC
- maintains a web page with contact details and relevant links to websites
- widely promotes professional development, publications, the website and other media to eligible ECEC services in the state or territory
- in collaboration with the state/territory Indigenous Professional Support Units, establish strategies for updating eligible Indigenous ECEC services with the latest ECEC research and news from the sector.

Fees for the delivery of professional development and support are based on principles whereby fees:

- reflect the capacity of the market to pay
- for eligible ECEC services are not based on full cost recovery
- for non-eligible ECEC services are based on full cost recovery
- maximise client participation (low enough to encourage attendance but high enough to be a disincentive to non-attendance post booking)
- are not charged to eligible Indigenous children's services receiving BBF Programme (Department of Education 2013c).

Indigenous Professional Support Units

Indigenous Professional Support Units provide or facilitate professional development and other support to assist Indigenous-focused BBF services and their managing bodies to provide high quality education and care environments. Indigenous Professional Support Units also provide advice to other IPSP providers on culturally appropriate support and resources to assist mainstream services to include and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and educators.

Indigenous Professional Support Units are required to promote their services and contact details to Indigenous-focused BBF services within the state or territory in a variety of ways, including visits, websites and flyers. The professional development and support provided by Indigenous Professional Support Units is in priority areas agreed by the Department of Education. These currently include:

- leadership and management
- the development of operational management systems for Indigenous focused BBF services in the areas such as financial management, employment and workforce issues, business planning and support for management committees
- building the capacity of Indigenous focused BBF services to work together with families
- programming and curriculum development
- provision of a quality environment that supports learning and development, guiding children's behaviour, managing challenging behaviours and working with diverse family expectations
- health, safety and nutrition.

Indigenous Professional Support Units are required to manage and monitor their budget in accordance with the terms and conditions of their funding agreement with the Department of Education, this includes providing detailed expenditure reports on the budget on a six monthly basis and an annual audited financial report.

Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters

HIPPY is a home based parenting and childhood development program targeted at disadvantaged communities. The program aims at building the confidence and skills of parents to create a positive learning environment to prepare their child for school.

HIPPY began as a research project in Israel in 1969. In 1998, the Brotherhood of St Laurence established the first Australian program in the City of Yarra, Victoria. The program currently operates in the United States, Germany, Austria, South Africa, Canada, El Salvador, Italy, Australia and New Zealand.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence has exclusive licensing rights from HIPPY International to run the program in Australia. The Brotherhood of St Laurence has sub-license arrangements with other not-for-profit organisations to deliver HIPPY to selected communities.

The Australian Government has committed over \$100 million to support ongoing HIPPY programs and expand the program. In 2013 the Australian Government announced an extension of HIPPY into 50 additional locations, with an emphasis on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities. Twenty five new HIPPY communities were selected in 2013 and a process is currently underway to select a further 25 communities. From 2015 HIPPY is expected to be supporting 2350 children in 100 locations.

The 2014 process for selecting new communities for the delivery of HIPPY has two stages. In the first stage, communities have the opportunity to nominate to have HIPPY delivered to their community. Selection criteria for this stage include:

- a minimum population of 100 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children aged birth to 4 years
- a strong need for an early childhood program
- a not-for-profit provider who can deliver the program or find a suitable provider.

Stage two involves a detailed assessment of shortlisted communities including a location visit and information session in each community. Key criteria include:

- the ability of the community to participate in the program in line with the HIPPY model
- strong community support for HIPPY
- factors that may influence the success of HIPPY delivery in the community (Department of Education 2014f).

The Department of Education also considers a range of factors when identifying HIPPY communities such as Census information, Australian Early Development Index results, Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas data and the Australian Standard Geographical Classification.

Once communities are identified, the Brotherhood of St Laurence undertake a separate competitive selection process to identify suitable not-for-profit program providers to deliver HIPPO. Providers receive funding to support the employment and training of tutors and local co-ordinators, local operating costs, and program materials (Department of Education 2014f).

Family Tax Benefit

The FTB is a payment that helps eligible families with the cost of raising children. It is made up of two parts:

- FTB Part A is paid per-child and the amount paid is dependent on family income and the number and age of children
- FTB Part B is paid per-family and gives extra help to single parents and families with one main income.

Family Tax Benefit Part A

Currently, a family receives the maximum FTB Part A rate if adjusted taxable family income is \$48 837 or less. In most cases FTB Part A is calculated using two income tests and families receive the highest rate from the two tests. The first test reduces the maximum rate of FTB Part A by 20 cents for each dollar above \$48 837 until the payment reaches the base rate of FTB Part A. The second test reduces the base rate of FTB Part A by 30 cents for each dollar above \$94 316 (plus \$3796 for each FTB child after the first) until the payment reaches nil (DHS 2014e). However, from 1 July 2015, a per-child add-on amount (\$3796 for second and each subsequent child) will no longer be used to calculate a family's income-free area for FTB Part A (DHS 2014c).

The base amount of FTB Part A per fortnight is currently \$53.31 per child per fortnight. The maximum payment rate per fortnight is:

- \$172.20 for each child aged 0 to 12 years
- \$224.00 for each child aged 13 to 19 years
- \$55.16 for each child aged 0 to 19 years in an Approved Care Organisation. (An Approved Care Organisation is an organisation that co-ordinates or provides residential care services to young people that has been approved by the relevant departmental Secretary. It includes agencies which assist homeless youth, care for intellectually or physically handicapped children, accommodate refugees, adoption and foster care agencies and public hospitals providing long term or permanent care for intellectually, emotionally or physically disabled young people.)

Indexation of the maximum and base rates of FTB Part A have been paused until 1 July 2016 (DHS 2014f).

The FTB Part A supplement is dependent on family income and is currently up to \$726.35 per year for each child. However, from July 2015 the supplement will be reduced to \$600 per year and will no longer be indexed (DHS 2014d). The supplement is paid when FTB payments have been reconciled with taxable income after the end of the financial year.

If a FTB Part A child is turning 4 years old and the parent is in receipt of an income support payment (such as the Parenting Payment, Newstart Allowance or a payment from the Department of Veterans' Affairs) the supplement may be withheld if the child does not get a health check to ensure they are healthy, fit and ready to learn when they start school. The supplement may also be withheld if a child is not fully immunised at age 1, 2 and 5 years, or is on a recognised immunisation catch up schedule, or has an approved exemption (DHS 2014f).

Large families may also be eligible for the Large Family Supplement which is currently \$12.32 per fortnight for each third and subsequent child (DHS 2014f). However, from 1 July 2015 the FTB Part A Large Family Supplement will be limited to families with four or more children.

Family Tax Benefit Part B

The amount of FTB Part B per fortnight families are eligible for is dependent on family income and the age of the youngest child.

Single parent families with an adjusted taxable income of more than \$150 000 per year are ineligible for FTB Part B. Single parent families with income less than this limit are eligible for the maximum rate of FTB Part B. The current maximum payment rate for FTB Part B is:

- \$146.44 per fortnight if the youngest child is aged under 5 years
- \$102.20 per fortnight if the youngest child is aged between 5 and 18 years (DHS 2014g).

Indexations of the maximum rates of FTB Part B have been paused until 1 July 2016.

Currently, two parent families in which the primary income earner has an adjusted taxable income of more than \$150 000 per year are not eligible for FTB Part B. If the primary income earner's income is at or below this limit FTB part B is assessed on the second earners income. Currently, secondary earners can earn up to \$5183 each year before it affects the rate of Family Tax Benefit Part B. Payments are reduced by 20 cents for each dollar of income earned over \$5183. Secondary earners are ineligible for FTB Part B when income exceeds:

- \$26 390 a year, if the youngest child is under 5 years of age or
- \$20 532 a year, if the youngest child is 5 to 18 years of age (DHS 2013).

However, from 1 July 2015, eligibility for FTB Part B will change.

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- The primary income threshold for eligibility for FTB Part B will be reduced from \$150 000 to \$100 000 per year. This applies to both new and existing recipients of FTB Part B.
 - Families will no longer receive the payment when their youngest child turns 6 years of age. However, in order to give existing recipients time to adjust the Australian Government has introduced a two year grandfathering to this change (DHS 2014a).

To assist low-income single parent families, from the impact of these changes, in July 2015 a \$750 allowance will be available to single parent families. It will be paid as an additional component of FTB Part A and will be paid for each child in the family aged between 6 and 12 years. The allowance will be paid automatically to customers who are eligible for FTB Part A who:

- are single
- are in receipt of FTB Part A at the maximum rate
- are not in receipt of FTB Part B and
- have a child(ren) aged between 6 and 12 years (DHS 2014b).

FTB Part B supplement (currently, up to \$354.05 per family per year) is available for eligible FTB Part B recipients after the end of the financial year (DHS 2014g). However, from July 2015 the supplement will be reduced to \$300 per year and no longer be indexed (DHS 2014d).