



EARLY YEARS
MANAGEMENT

POLICY
FRAMEWORK

PART 1



About this Document

The EYM Policy Framework (Part 1) and supporting EYM Kindergarten Operating Guidelines (Part 2) have been introduced to replace the 2009 Kindergarten Cluster Management Policy.

Part 1 – EYM Policy Framework sets out the background and context for Early Years Management. It outlines the partnership approach between EYM organisations, families, the Department of Education and Training (the Department) and local government that is fundamental to the effectiveness of the model, and is an overarching framework that:

- provides a vision for EYM
- provides a sound basis for EYM organisations and partners to undertake strategic planning
- introduces outcomes for EYM that provide a consistent and transparent way of monitoring the impact of EYM at organisational and system levels.

Part 2 – EYM Kindergarten Operating Guidelines provide detailed operational information and processes for:

- Committees of Management considering pursuing EYM partnership arrangements
- Committees of Management and EYM providers to ensure the partnership is effective in providing sustainable and quality services
- local government supporting EYM in their municipalities
- organisations seeking to become an EYM provider.

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- Hume City Council
- Kinders Together Association
- Loddon Mallee Preschool Association
- Yarra City Council
- Yarriambiack Shire Council.

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This document is also available on the internet at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/edcare/Pages/eym.aspx>

The change from KCM to EYM is being introduced to acknowledge the important role KCM organisations already play in providing a range of early years services. EYM will continue to be a key platform for delivering quality, integrated and sustainable services for children and families in their communities.

EARLY YEARS MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

The introduction of Early Years Management (EYM) reflects the broader role Kindergarten Cluster Management (KCM) organisations fulfil in delivering additional early years services. This broader approach aims to promote a long-term vision towards a more integrated and sustainable early childhood education and care (ECEC) system.

KCM IN VICTORIA

KCM was introduced in Victoria in 2003 to strengthen the management and delivery of community-based kindergarten programs, and to provide kindergarten staff with professional employment arrangements.

The Victorian Government recognises the critical role KCM organisations have played in supporting the viability and sustainability of community-based early years services, and in helping to achieve outcomes for all Victorian children and families through providing high-quality services.

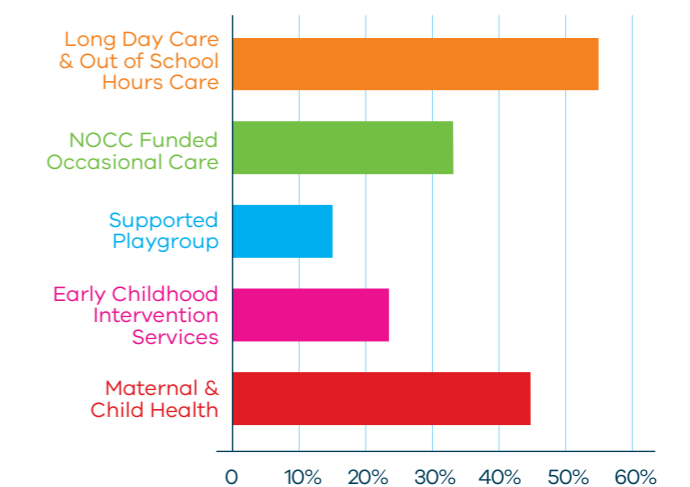
The achievements of KCM include:

- providing high-quality education services to a significant proportion of children and families experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage
- directly supporting the proven drivers of quality, in particular the management and professional development of staff
- ensuring the sustainability and quality of kindergarten services in rural, regional and disadvantaged areas
- driving the implementation of policy reforms, such as the National Quality Framework (NQF) and Universal Access.

As the KCM platform has matured, KCM organisations have continued to demonstrate their commitment to improving access to quality early years services. They have extended service delivery to other complementary early years programs and offerings to provide more integrated responses to the community.

As at 2015, over 80 per cent of KCM organisations deliver other early years services, such as long day care, occasional child care and playgroups. There is also an increasing number of cluster-managed integrated learning centres, and services that are provided in partnership with schools.

Percent of EYMs that provide other service types



The graph above shows a breakdown of additional services provided by KCM organisations, as at 2015.



Extending the KCM Platform

There is now an opportunity to acknowledge and foster the broader role that KCM organisations already play in integrating additional early years services that are responsive to local communities and their families.

In 2014, most KCM organisations were already providing other types of early years services.

- Of KCM organisations that were not a local government organisation, 73 per cent provided early years services in addition to kindergarten.
- Of KCM organisations that were a local government organisation, 73 per cent provided at least one other early years service, in addition to providing kindergarten and Maternal and Child Health (MCH).

The change from KCM to EYM is being introduced to reflect the long-term vision to extend the KCM platform beyond the management of kindergarten services. EYM signifies the broader role these community-based, not-for-profit organisations already play within the early years sector, and the move towards achieving a more integrated and sustainable service system into the future.

Number of services provided by EYM organisations 2015



- Only kindergarten provided (18%)
- 1 other service (38%)
- 2 other services (20%)
- 3 other services (16%)
- 4 other services (7%)

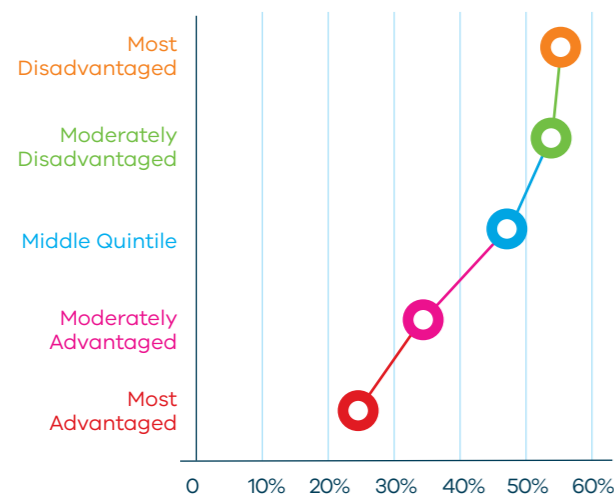
The Benefits of EYM

EYM organisations lead and manage sustainable services that are focussed on improving outcomes for children. The benefits of EYM are multiple:

- children benefit from high-quality, inclusive services provided by professionals who are well supported to adopt contemporary and evidence-based practices
- parents can focus their involvement on supporting their children's learning free of the compliance, industrial, financial and operational obligations required of approved early childhood service providers
- staff benefit from organisational structures and processes that support them in their day-to-day work, but also have a view to the future creating career pathways and professional development opportunities that align with their aspirations.



Percentage of all kindergarten services offered by a KCM organisation by Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage 2014



As at 2015, over 80 per cent of KCM organisations deliver other early years services, such as long day care, occasional child care and playgroups.



STRATEGIC CONTEXT

In recent times, there have been major policy reforms in early childhood education. These reforms were aimed at improving outcomes for all children by further improving access to and the quality of ECEC.

The Education State

In 2014, the Andrews Labor Government committed to making Victoria the Education State. Victoria aims to be a global centre of excellence in learning and development and to ensure all Victorians, regardless of their starting point or postcode, have the skills, knowledge and attributes they need to shape their future in a changing world.

In the Education State, Victorians value education, for themselves and those around them, at all stages of life and recognise that some stages of learning have a more significant impact on life outcomes. This starts with a focus on the early years to ensure all children get the best start in life, with access to safe, quality early childhood services, and support to learn, play and grow. A key focus of reform is creating a more flexible and integrated service system to ensure children and families experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage are supported to succeed.

The National Quality Framework

In 2009 all Australian governments committed to raising the quality and consistency of education and care services in Australia, and in 2012 the National Quality Framework (NQF) commenced. The NQF drives continuous improvement with a focus on improving education and care outcomes for all children.

The NQF has three approved learning frameworks that guide professional practice and provide a shared language for early childhood professionals and families to use.

These are:

- *the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF)*
- *the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF)*
- *My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia (MTOF)*.

All three frameworks are aligned and complementary.

They share the same five learning outcomes agreed by all Australian governments as being important for children's development.

The VEYLDF is intended to support the work of all early childhood professionals, while the EYLF is designed specifically for early childhood educators.

These frameworks provide a shared language for educators and ensure that each child participates in a program that caters to their individual needs, interests and experiences.

Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out-of-Home Care

The Government is committed to supporting Victoria's children and their families experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage.

The Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out-of-Home Care reflects the shared commitment between the education sector, statutory child protection systems and the early years sector to ensure access for all children who live in Out-of-Home-Care. It outlines how all parties must collaborate to give all children access to high-quality ECEC services.

The agreement was signed in partnership with the Department of Education and Training, the Department of Health and Human Services, and with peak early years bodies in the sector: the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA).



THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT'S EYM VISION

EYM is the leading platform to achieve improved outcomes for all young children, through the delivery of world class, accessible early childhood education and care services.

EYM organisations will continue to provide high-quality kindergarten services. This policy framework acknowledges the level of integration already achieved under KCM and promotes an expanded role that will, over time, build a more cohesive and holistic approach to providing services that support young children.

To achieve the EYM vision, this policy framework seeks to:

- reinforce the leadership role of EYM organisations in driving quality reform in the ECEC sector
- strengthen the focus of EYM (through the EYM Outcomes and Draft Performance Framework) on improved outcomes and participation of all children, particularly those who are experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage
- support EYM organisations to fulfil a broader role within the early years sector and deliver high-quality, integrated, sustainable and viable early years services
- clarify the role and authority of EYM partners and EYM organisations to ensure that each partner understands their role in providing responsive services.



While all early years service providers should strive to deliver EYM outcomes, for EYM organisations they are core business.

SECTION 1 EYM OUTCOMES AND MONITORING

EYM outcomes guide the leadership and delivery of high-quality early years services.

EYM OUTCOMES

The EYM outcomes that follow were developed using evidence that identified key elements for providing high-quality early years services and provide the basis for monitoring the impact of EYM in Victoria.

They provide a consistent focus on:

- achieving improved educational outcomes for children
- promoting community confidence in an EYM organisation's ability to deliver quality, sustainable services, now and into the future.

The EYM outcomes align with the way the Department monitors sector performance broadly across early childhood, schools and higher education.

Working towards the outcomes will also progress Victoria's commitment to become the Education State, which prioritises the following five areas for reform to achieve excellent outcomes for all Victorian children:

- earlier engagement in learning
- boost to educational quality
- more support for parents
- more support for children and families experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage
- better connection between services.

While the outcomes are primarily focused on guiding EYM organisations in the management and delivery of kindergarten services, in working towards achieving these outcomes EYM organisations will be well-positioned to deliver additional early years services that respond to the needs of families and their communities.



MONITORING AND REVIEWING EYM ARRANGEMENTS

All EYM partners have a significant role in monitoring EYM arrangements to ensure improved outcomes for children and responsiveness to changing needs of families and the local community.

The EYM Outcomes and Draft Performance Framework is designed be a transparent and consistent approach for all partners in reviewing organisational and system performance.

At an organisational level:

- the Department monitors the performance of EYM organisations by reviewing performance against the measures and outcomes outlined in the framework. This draws on information derived through the NQF and the service agreement monitoring processes
- families can use the framework to review if EYM arrangements are meeting the needs of their children and their community.

At a system level:

- the Department works with key stakeholders, including EYM providers, to monitor the responsiveness and effectiveness of the system. This includes identifying changed conditions and potential gaps that impact on the achievement of identified outcomes
- local government organisations will use the framework to ensure EYM arrangements in their municipality are responsive to the needs of the local communities and are consistent with changes to their role in early years service provision.



VISION

EYM is the leading platform to achieve improved outcomes for all young children, through the delivery of world class, accessible early childhood education and care services.

FOUNDATION OUTCOME: SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIVE SERVICES

EYM organisations are sustainable, viable and responsive to children, families and communities. They are built on strong and effective governance and partnership arrangements. The community has confidence in EYM.

Good internal governance and leadership systems are essential to delivering EYM outcomes. EYM organisations have strong internal governance and leadership systems that:

- support, develop and empower early childhood professionals and staff to deliver quality services. These systems proactively manage financial, regulatory and reputational risks, and ensure the viability of the EYM organisation and the services it manages
- establish and maintain productive partnerships with stakeholders, so all parties understand their roles in supporting the provision of quality early years services and improving outcomes for children.

EYM organisations have planning systems in place that improve their responsiveness to local needs. By tuning in to the needs of the community, EYM organisations are able to provide integrated services that seek optimum participation in early years services.

Evidence

Management that focuses on responsiveness to local needs, quality improvement and effective team building is a crucial component in delivering quality early childhood education and care.¹

An American study found that services delivering high-quality education and care had leadership that emphasised good financial planning and management, respected and supported educators, and looked beyond minimum licencing standards to guide program practice.²

Good organisational governance has been found to drive performance, rather than the other way around.³

ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION

EYM organisations drive high levels of participation for all children, in particular for those who are experiencing the highest levels of vulnerability and disadvantage.

EYM organisations have the capacity to influence positive outcomes for all children across the services they manage by providing professional management and leadership that promotes evidence-based, inclusive practices. EYM organisations create a welcoming and culturally inclusive environment where all families are encouraged to participate in and contribute to children's learning and development experiences.

EYM organisations link with sector partners to maximise the participation of all children. This can mean being part of local government registration and central enrolment processes (where available) and working closely with other services (e.g. Child FIRST) to proactively identify children that might miss out on established enrolment processes.

Evidence

Many international studies have shown that quality early childhood education and care has the greatest benefit for children from low socio-economic backgrounds, enabling these children to catch up with their peers.¹ However, the E4Kids project (Australia) has found that low socio-economic areas have less availability of early childhood education and care services, and what is available is of lower quality.



QUALITY AND INNOVATION

EYM organisations lead a world-class early years system in Victoria by implementing contemporary, evidence-based improvements in teaching and learning, and by sharing knowledge and experience with the broader sector.

EYM leadership is critical to ensuring that the conditions to drive quality and innovative service provision for children and families are in place. EYM organisations draw on current research about child development and effective practices to underpin all aspects of service delivery. This includes:

- sharing knowledge with all levels of the organisation and the broader sector
- establishing planning processes that enable staff to continually review and reflect on practice
- identifying improvements and implementing new, evidence-based service delivery models and practice approaches.

Evidence

Numerous studies show that early childhood teaching methods, including teacher knowledge and the quality of teacher interactions with children, have a particularly important effect on children's learning outcomes.²

Research shows that leadership is second only to teaching as an influence on learning, and that the quality and practice of leadership is linked in a consistent and demonstrable way to improved educational outcomes.³





HIGHLY-SKILLED, COLLABORATIVE WORKFORCE

EYM organisations recruit, retain and invest in a highly-skilled, collaborative workforce.

EYM organisations strategically plan and implement workforce initiatives that focus on recruiting and retaining a highly-skilled workforce.

Early childhood professionals are inclusive and work in partnership with families and other services to provide individualised support for children.

EYM organisations provide a range of experiences and career pathways within their organisation, making them a highly attractive employment option for early childhood professionals, and encouraging loyalty and retention.

Evidence

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education study found that qualified early childhood teachers were central to providing quality education and care that was linked to better cognitive and social-behavioural outcomes for children. An Australian study found that quality could be improved by selecting high-quality teachers and supporting them to maximise their capacity.¹



STRONG PARTNERSHIPS

EYM organisations collaborate with all EYM partners, community organisations, schools and other early years stakeholders to lead the development and coordination of quality services that improve outcomes for children.

EYM organisations commit to and value strong partnerships that support a coordinated approach to providing high-quality services for children and families. They actively engage with all EYM partners, other early childhood organisations and schools.

EYM organisations lead the development of collaborative organisational cultures and processes by building communities of practice within and beyond their organisation. This occurs through strong partnerships with all early childhood stakeholders, schools and other EYM organisations.

Evidence

- Research demonstrates that parental engagement in ECEC services enhances children's achievements and adaptation.¹
- Likewise, if the connection between schools and communities is strong, it is easier for children to develop the skills they need to be successful – socially, emotionally, physically and academically.²



More information about EYM performance monitoring and application of the EYM Outcomes and Draft Performance Framework is available in the EYM Kindergarten Operating Guidelines.



Clear articulation of roles and responsibilities guides high-quality service provision and enables EYM partners to operate with certainty within the complex EYM environment.

SECTION 2 EYM PARTNERS

EYM is built on a four-way partnership, where partners work together to deliver quality early education experiences for all children.

The partners are:

- families
- EYM Organisations
- local government
- the Department

Each partner has a unique role in directly or indirectly supporting learning and development of children, and in improving educational outcomes for children. Given the varying roles, it is critical that all partners are clear about the contribution they all make towards achieving the same goals.

Clear articulation of roles and responsibilities enables EYM partners to perform their roles with confidence, ultimately contributing to the overall effectiveness and sustainability of EYM in Victoria.

FAMILIES

Families are children's first teachers and are central to their growth and development. Families create supportive relationships and environments that nurture children's early learning.

Increasing evidence has shown that a child's development is greatly influenced by the environment they grow up in. Communities that surround families also play a significant role, because children's development takes place through reciprocal interactions between children and their environment.

Families:

- provide children with the relationships, opportunities and experiences that shape their learning and development
- choose the early years program that best meets the needs of their child
- engage with and contribute to the service and the broader community to support children to achieve improved educational outcomes
- engage with their child's educators so the educational program can be tailored to meet the individual needs of the child
- provide advice on the services they need to maximise their children's development, and they put this in the context of their family commitments, such as work, study or caring for relatives.

Families play a central role during a child's early years, which is a time of maximum growth and development.





The Role of Families in EYM-Managed Kindergarten Services

In EYM-managed kindergarten services, families can choose to actively engage with the EYM organisation by participating in a PAG. The PAG provides families with the opportunity to focus on enhancing their children's experience, and connecting with the broader community.

EYM organisations are expected to engage families who use every kindergarten service they provide to ensure that the program is responsive to the needs of the local community.

A PAG is a clear mechanism to facilitate feedback from families accessing the service regarding:

- the objectives of the kindergarten and EYM organisation
- the development of kindergarten policy, where appropriate

- decisions that affect opportunities for families to be involved in a kindergarten program
- development and delivery of the kindergarten program and service delivery, and any community issues or concerns to the EYM organisation
- input into the future planning of the service
- negotiated roles, like fundraising.

A PAG supports the EYM organisation to deliver an effective EYM service, which is guided by the EYM vision (see page 13), the EYM Outcomes and Draft Performance Framework, the EYM partnership agreement (where relevant) and the EYM Kindergarten Operating Guidelines.

For EYM services that are not kindergartens, consultation between families and the EYM organisation is still important, but may not take place through the same formal structure as a PAG. EYM organisations need to engage families in a way that suits them and their participation in the service.



The Historical Role of Families in Kindergarten Services

Victoria has a long tradition of standalone kindergarten services operated by independent incorporated associations that are managed by volunteer Committees of Management.

A 2001 review of issues impacting on the delivery of kindergarten services in Victoria identified that families were carrying a significant burden in administering and managing kindergarten services. Moreover, families and parents were in a conflicting role of being both user and manager of the kindergarten service.

The review also identified the need for professionalised leadership of educators and consistent management to provide a stable platform for quality service provision.

A Change to this Role

Professional management arrangements were introduced through KCM organisations (now called EYM organisations) so that incorporated associations operated by parent Committees of Management could change their role – from being the kindergarten service provider to taking a role that supports the educational program provided at services.

When reviewing the impact of this change to their roles, some incorporated associations identified that there was no longer a need for the association to continue. Other associations have revised their constitutions and structures to reflect their new consultative role.

The term Parent Advisory Group (PAG) has been used in this policy document to refer to the change in roles.

EYM ORGANISATIONS

Formerly known as KCM organisations, EYM organisations provide leadership and management to funded community-based kindergarten services, and to other complementary early years services.

They work collaboratively with EYM partners and local stakeholders to deliver improved outcomes for children, and to ensure service delivery is guided by the EYM outcomes.

Roles and Responsibilities

EYM organisations:

- provide service delivery according to their regulatory obligations, this policy framework, the EYM Kindergarten Operating Guidelines, *The Kindergarten Guide*, the NQF and Funding and Service Agreements
- assume all the responsibilities of an approved provider as specified in the National Law and the regulations
- establish and review effective governance practices that support professional leadership and management systems
- contribute to policy development, sector planning, policy reform implementation and service design.

They are specifically responsible for:

- strategically planning for the future to ensure the organisation is viable, in step with policy reforms and positioned to implement innovation
- engaging with the local community to gain a broad understanding of the needs that relate to the services they manage, and working collaboratively with local government, schools and other service providers to plan for and provide responsive services
- driving access for all children, and proactively seeking the participation of children experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage, Aboriginal children, children from newly arrived communities, and children with disabilities or developmental delays
- engaging families, parents and the broader community in decisions about policies and the educational experiences of children in their services
- employing, managing and developing staff
- financial management to support the strategic management of all resources – including Department funding, parent fees, and fundraising (including monies held in reserve) – to ensure service provision is viable and delivered in the best interests of the community
- continuously improving through performance monitoring.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is key to matching the EYM organisation's vision and priorities with the EYM Outcomes and the long-term sustainability of service provision.

Strategic planning for EYM organisations includes:

- undertaking regular, ongoing planning processes in consultation with management, staff, families and parents
- reviewing data about local needs and consulting with the local community
- working closely with local government and local stakeholders to gain input into the Municipal Early Years Plans
- understanding the operating environment, such as current policies, legislation, relevant local plans and community needs
- planning for and implementing government initiatives, like increasing access for children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage, and implementing the NQF
- considering future growth plans and having a clearly articulated position and strategy on expanding the organisation, where appropriate.

Community Engagement

EYM organisations have a strong presence within their local communities and are expected to collaborate so they can provide services that the community needs, at the times they are needed.

It is vital that EYM organisations establish and maintain robust relationships with EYM partners and other stakeholders through regular and proactive engagement.

To engage effectively with the local community, EYM organisations:

- maintain strong relationships with local government, and participate in all local planning and central enrolment processes (where available)
- establish relationships with other local stakeholders to ensure disadvantaged children and families are engaged and participate in the service
- establish relationships with schools to support transition to school processes
- maintain cooperative relationships with other EYM organisations to coordinate services and share best practice.



Access and Participation for all Children

EYM organisations provide responsive early years services and kindergarten programs that promote the access and participation of all children. EYM organisations play an important role in engaging children and families experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage, and those that are hard-to-reach as early as possible.

EYM organisations drive access and participation by:

- implementing integrated support and referral networks with community partners to reach all children and families. This includes actively participating in local government central enrolment processes (where available) and working closely with community partners to identify and engage disadvantaged children in services (e.g. Child FIRST and family services, and Aboriginal community controlled organisations)

- implementing and communicating enrolment and priority of access processes, which meet the responsibilities outlined in the *Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out-of-Home-Care*
- providing educators with tailored professional development that helps them to implement effective inclusive practices, and to facilitate engagement with children and families with specific needs
- establishing outreach practices that support participation.

EYM organisations use their expertise in early years and their professional management skills to deliver high-quality services that directly benefit children.

Engaging Families and Parents

EYM organisations establish processes that ensure regular consultation occurs with families and parents who are currently accessing the service and with those looking to access the service in the near future.

Effective engagement processes enable the EYM organisation to identify issues early and reduce the likelihood of issues escalating to the formal dispute resolution processes.

For kindergarten services managed by an EYM organisation, a volunteer PAG is a useful conduit for engaging the broader parent community that is accessing the service.

Given the annual change in families accessing the service, it is important for EYM organisations to formally reconfirm roles and responsibilities with families and parents once a year.

This establishes effective relationships with families and parents and sets clear expectations for communicating and feeding back information about the service.

The Department will monitor the EYM organisation's structures and processes that enable the participation of the family and parent community accessing the service.

Managing and Developing Employees

EYM organisations employ, manage and support all staff within their services, in line with the appropriate employment agreement.

EYM organisations are responsible for policies and processes regarding the recruitment, management and development of all staff. This includes:

- establishing and implementing recruitment and human resources policies and processes to guide professional practice
- undertaking individual employee performance reviews
- supporting educators to implement the NQF and other relevant legislation.

To recruit, retain and invest in a highly-skilled workforce, EYM organisations:

- implement organisational structures that provide regular and direct support to educators and staff
- provide educational leadership in teaching methods
- support educators and staff to access high-quality professional development opportunities
- support networking opportunities for knowledge sharing and building communities of practice, both within the EYM organisation and across the early years sector
- establish pathways and mentoring that support career development within the sector.

It is critical that an EYM organisation's operating practices provide regular and direct support to educators and staff working in the organisation's kindergarten services, including establishing and communicating clear processes for raising issues or concerns.

See the *Employee Management and Development Kit* for more information.





It is important that EYM organisations undertake their financial management responsibilities transparently, in a manner that assures the community that funds are being used to deliver high-quality services.

EYM organisations invest in drivers of quality to benefit the entire organisation, such as educator support and professional development.

When establishing EYM arrangements, both parties must agree on how fundraising and reserve money will be allocated and acquitted, and on the approach for handling financial liabilities.

This should include whether fundraising and reserve monies will be used for an individual service (such as playground equipment) or for the benefit of the whole organisation (such as professional development).

Continuously Improving Through Performance Monitoring

Performance monitoring provides timely feedback on the organisation's actions and on the approach for handling financial liabilities.

To foster continuous improvement and high-quality service delivery at an organisational level, EYM organisations establish performance monitoring and improvement processes that align with the EYM Outcomes and Draft Performance Framework.

The Department, in partnership with MAV and ELAA, will oversee and monitor coverage of EYM across Victoria, to ensure the needs of all families and all communities are met. Gaps, limitations and risks identified will be periodically reviewed in collaboration and consultation with EYM partners.

For more information about EYM performance monitoring for kindergarten services, see the EYM Kindergarten Operating Guidelines.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

As the third tier of government, local government organisations understand and represent the interests of the local community.

Local government plays a key legislated role in strategically planning and coordinating early years services within a municipality, and acts in the best interests of the community.

Many local government organisations also provide early years facilities and services, and undertake the role of an EYM organisation.

Planning and Coordinating Services in their Community

Local government plays an important role as an EYM partner.

In Victoria, local government has a statutory role in planning for its communities. The Victorian State–Local Government Agreement, signed between the Victorian Government and MAV, guides state–local government relations. It acknowledges the key role of local government in improving coordination and strategic planning of government services at the local level.

Roles and Responsibilities

Local government makes a critical contribution to the early years system (and supporting EYM organisations) through its role in:

- planning and coordinating services in the community
- supporting EYM service delivery
- providing early years infrastructure
- operating as an EYM organisation.



Financial Management

EYM organisations are responsible for the financial management of all services to support ongoing viability.

Financial management of an EYM organisation includes:

- planning and preparing budgets to ensure each service within the organisation is operationally viable
- undertaking regular financial reporting and review
- administering and collecting parent kindergarten fees
- acquitting and reconciling Department funding
- maintaining accurate financial records, in line with standard accounting practices.

Local government is responsible for strategic local area planning that meets the needs of the local community. It does this through its Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plans and its non-statutory Municipal Early Years Plans. These plans provide strategic direction for coordinating educational, care and health programs, and activities within the municipality that affect children – from birth, through kindergarten, to the time they enter school.

As part of their planning role, local government organisations will review EYM arrangements in their municipalities to ensure they remain responsive to the needs of local communities and are consistent with any changes to their role in early years service provision.

It is essential for local government organisations to regularly engage with local early years service providers, including EYM organisations, to exchange data and information related to the needs of the community, such as information on enrolments, capacity and utilisation. This allows all providers to work together in responding to current and future community needs, and ensures that all children – particularly those who are experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage – have access to quality early years services, including kindergarten programs.

Setting up a new EYM organisation and adding new EYM kindergarten partnerships requires consultation and endorsement from the relevant local government organisation to ensure the new services align with local planning and early years priorities within the municipality. See the EYM Kindergarten Operating Guidelines for more information.

You can also find more information on the role of local government on the MAV website at www.mav.asn.au and in *The Kindergarten Guide*.

Supporting EYM Service Delivery

Local government has a role in supporting the effective operation of early childhood education services by providing infrastructure, central enrolment and registration processes and, in some local government areas, by directly providing services.

Many local government organisations support the sector by extending professional development opportunities to staff and educators from all services, including EYM organisations.

Local government organisations collaborate with EYM organisations and other stakeholders to align capacity-building initiatives with the needs and interests of the local community.

Though the models of engagement and the relationships between local government and EYM organisations vary across the state, strong collaboration in planning and coordinating services between parties is expected.



Providing Early Years Infrastructure

In its planning role, local government advocates, plans and collaborates with a range of stakeholders to make sure that current and future demand for facilities can be met.

Where local government organisations own facilities, they manage these assets on behalf of the community. To maximise asset use, facilities are often used by multiple community groups for a variety of purposes. This includes standalone kindergarten services run by volunteer parent Committees of Management and EYM kindergarten services.

When an EYM organisation is considering forming a new EYM partnership and the service operates in a local government-owned facility, the parties must discuss arrangements for the future use of facilities with the council.

Local government organisations may decide to enter into a facility-use arrangement, such as a lease, with an EYM organisation. These arrangements enable the EYM organisation and local government an opportunity to work together to make sure the facility is fully utilised. Facility-use arrangements should be formalised to confirm the expectations and responsibilities of both parties.

Particularly for kindergarten provision, it is preferred that formal arrangements for using local government-owned facilities are with the approved provider, which will be the EYM organisation. However, it is understood that some local government organisations may have specific conditions that require the formal arrangements to be with an incorporated association operated by parent volunteers instead.

Operating as an EYM Organisation

Local government has a long history of providing early years services.

Where a local government operates as an EYM organisation, its role as both planner and provider puts it in a strong position to understand and respond to community needs. This in turn helps it to coordinate service provision with other providers in the municipality, including other EYM organisations.

As at 2016, all local government organisations provide early years infrastructure, 62 per cent operate central enrolment processes and 35 per cent are funded to provide EYM for kindergarten services in their municipality.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

On behalf of the Victorian community, the Department oversees the design, development and operation of the EYM system. The Department executes its stewardship role in collaboration and consultation with all EYM partners, to support high-quality learning outcomes for children.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Department has overarching responsibility for EYM-funded services. In its stewardship role it is responsible for:

- providing strategic planning and policy direction to assist EYM organisations and partners in service planning and development
- undertaking performance monitoring and evaluation of EYM organisations and EYM in Victoria, to ensure improved outcomes for children

- providing operational guidance and support
- planning and organising EYM forums, to facilitate opportunities for the sector to reflect and share knowledge regarding contemporary, effective practice
- funding providers of early years services.

The Department's stewardship role is supported by a key strategic partnership with ELAA and MAV:

- ELAA represents the views and issues that impact on parents and service providers who are working to deliver high-quality early learning programs to all children
- MAV, through a partnership agreement with the Department, provides policy advice to local government and the Department, and contributes to the ongoing strengthening and operation of the EYM system.

The Department works at both a state and regional level, and is focused on achieving improved education outcomes for children. The following table summarises the role of the Department at central office and regional levels.

The Department's Role at Central Office and Regional Office Levels – Summary Table

	Central Office	Regional Office
	<p>The Department is responsible for policy development and overseeing the performance of the EYM system.</p> <p>Specifically, the Department:</p>	<p>The Department is responsible implementing policy and monitoring EYM organisational performance.</p> <p>Specifically, the Department:</p>
EYM SUPPORT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • directs policy and strategic planning in consultation with regional offices, ELAA and MAV • works with regional offices, ELAA and MAV to support EYM sector development in Victoria • monitors performance of EYM, including EYM data collection and analysis • supports regional offices with complex matters • assesses and endorses EYM provider applications in consultation with relevant regional offices at a state-wide level • approves new EYM kindergarten partnerships on advice from the Department's regional office and local government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitors performance of EYM organisations and administers and manages funding requirements • provides operational and planning support to EYM organisations, including convening regional network forums and working with EYM organisations to address unresolved disputes • consults with EYM organisations, local government and schools about strategic growth opportunities • assesses and provides recommendations to central office about applications to establish new EYM partnerships • provides confirmation to local government organisations for new EYM partnership agreements in their municipalities • participates in regular reviews of EYM arrangements at local government level, to ensure consistent alignment with local planning priorities • investigates complaints and is involved in dispute resolution processes.
NQF SUPPORT Quality Assessment and Regulation Division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • processes applications for new and amended provider and service approvals • supports regional offices with complex matters • processes applications for waivers and exemptions • provides supporting resources to implement the VEYLDF • works with other divisions of the Department and with external stakeholders to foster continuous improvement in education and care services • publishes resources including fact sheets and guides on the Department's website. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assesses and rates services against the NQS • visits services to monitor compliance with the <i>Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010</i> (the National Law) and its regulations and <i>Children's Services Act 1996</i> • receives notifications of serious incidents and complaints • investigates serious incidents and complaints • educates and guides providers to meet legislative obligations • enforces legislation through appropriate administrative and statutory sanctions and prosecutions.
ACECQA Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintains national information on the assessment, rating and regulation of education and care services • approves educator qualifications • publishes guides and resources for education and care services • assesses applications for Excellent ratings. 	



The Department aims to foster and support a high-quality, sustainable and responsive EYM system that allows EYM organisations to plan and operate with certainty.

Strategic Planning and Policy Development

In its stewardship role, the Department encourages greater service integration and links to other early years services, such as supported play groups, occasional child care and early childhood intervention services. This is done in a way that is responsive to the needs of families and communities.

Through strategic planning, partnerships and collaborative policy development, the Department proactively shapes and manages EYM in Victoria in line with the vision and outcomes set out in this policy framework.



The Department uses information, such as population projections, local government service planning data, and Department regional feedback about EYM service provider performance and strategic growth plans, to assess whether there is:

- adequate coverage of EYM services across Victoria
- adequate choice for community-based services to join EYM arrangements; particularly where these services are provided by incorporated associations that are governed by Committees of Management, which are made up of family members and parent volunteers.

Gaps, limitations or risks identified through the Department's analysis are periodically reviewed and addressed in collaboration and consultation with ELAA and MAV, EYM organisations and local government.

Performance Monitoring and Evaluation

The Department's regional offices lead performance monitoring and evaluation of EYM organisations. To foster continuous improvement and high-quality service delivery at an organisational level, EYM organisations are required to participate in performance monitoring processes. Regular performance monitoring encourages continuous organisational improvements.

The Department's regional offices monitor organisational performance against the EYM Outcomes and Draft Performance Framework (page 11).

The Department's central office uses information collected during this process, along with broader population data, to analyse the performance and impact of EYM across Victoria.

For more information about performance monitoring, see the EYM Kindergarten Operating Guidelines.

Operational Guidance and Support

For existing EYM organisations: The Department's regional offices are the primary contact for EYM organisations that seek support or guidance on:

- clarifying the roles and responsibilities of EYM partners
- implementing strategic expansion
- developing strategies to support the implementation and operation of the EYM Policy Framework and the EYM Kindergarten Operating Guidelines
- planning initiatives to strengthen the EYM organisation's service delivery
- increasing and strengthening links with local planning processes, and with service delivery and key regional networks
- identifying professional development opportunities for educators and staff.

For local government: The Department's regional offices may participate in reviews of EYM arrangements with local government organisations to align local planning and early years priorities. This ensures the work of EYM organisations continues to meet and respond to community needs.

For prospective EYM service providers:

The Department's central and regional offices provide information and guidance to prospective EYM organisations so that there is a consistent understanding of EYM and its policy parameters.

See the EYM Kindergarten Operating Guidelines for more information about becoming an EYM organisation.

Forums and Networking

The Department plans and organises EYM forums at regional and state levels.

State-wide forums are developed in consultation with EYM partners and peak bodies to provide EYM organisations an opportunity to reflect on research and best practice, and to examine relevant strategic issues.

These forums build relationships among EYM organisations across the state and provide opportunities for participants to exchange experience and knowledge.

The Department's regional forums have a similar focus, and also play an important role in service planning and coordination across regional and local government areas. The feedback gathered through these forums informs service design and policy development.

Funding

The Department provides contributory funding for the provision of early years services, including kindergartens, supported play groups, occasional child care and early inclusion support services. EYM funding is prioritised to enable community-based services – particularly those provided by incorporated associations run by volunteer Committees of Management – to join an EYM organisation to ensure the quality and sustainability of service delivery.

Services that are already incorporated into an EYM organisation's structure will not attract start-up and transition funding. Read more about funding in *The Kindergarten Guide*.

Forums provide an avenue for EYM organisations to network and share effective practices in leading and providing high-quality service delivery.



SECTION 3

ACRONYMS & GLOSSARY

A

Approved provider – Approved provider status is granted under the *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010*. It is the first step towards operating an education and care service. The EYM organisation is the approved provider of all NQF services within their organisation.

C

Committee of Management – The group of volunteer family members and parents that operates a kindergarten service on behalf of the incorporated association. The group is the approved provider and is legally responsible for a standalone community kindergarten. The decision to enter into EYM is made by the Committee of Management on behalf of and in consultation with all families and parents accessing the service.

D

Department of Education and Training (the Department).

E

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS) – Support services funded by the Department for families with children who have a disability or developmental delay prior to school entry.

Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA) – A peak organisation representing early childhood services, parents and EYM organisations. ELAA represents the views and issues that impact on parents and on the service providers who are working to deliver high-quality early learning programs to all children. See www.elaa.org.au.

Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF)

Early Years Management (EYM) – Formerly known as Kindergarten Cluster Management, EYM brings together a group of community-based kindergartens and other early years services under the management of a single organisation.

Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 (the National Law) and **Education and Care Services National Regulations 2014** (the regulations) – The National Law and the regulations set out the legal minimum standards for education and care services, like space requirements, educator-to-child ratios and educator qualifications.

EYM Organisation – The organisation responsible for the overall management and delivery of kindergarten and other early years services under their organisation. It works closely with other EYM partners (the Department, local government, families and PAGs).

EYM Partners – The four-way partnership between the Department, local government, EYM organisations, and families that underpins EYM in Victoria and improves educational outcomes for children.

EYM Partnership Agreement – The agreement between the EYM organisation and the service, which sets out roles and financial arrangements.

EYM Partnerships – The direct partnership between an EYM organisation and the early childhood education and care service(s) that the organisation manages.

Early Years Services – Services supporting the learning and development of children from birth to eight years old, such as kindergartens, play groups, long day care and occasional care. Some EYM organisations provide a number of these services.

F

Funding and Service Agreement – The contractual agreement between the Department and a funded entity, such as an EYM organisation or standalone kindergarten. It sets out roles and funding arrangements.

I

Incorporated Association – A legal structure adopted by a not-for-profit community organisation to formalise how the organisation operates and trades. Typically, a kindergarten service that is an incorporated association before it enters into an EYM arrangement is run by a Committee of Management. Some Committees of Management may retain their incorporated status after joining an EYM organisation. More information is on the Consumer Affairs Victoria website. See www.consumer.vic.gov.au/clubs-and-not-for-profits/incorporated-associations.

L

Local Government Area (LGA)

Long day care – Primarily aimed at children from birth to six years old, long day care may offer a funded, teacher-led kindergarten program.

M

Maternal Child and Health (MCH) – A Victorian community maternal and child health service that provides support and information to families with children from birth to school entry age, who live within the municipality.

Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) – The legislated peak body for Victoria's 79 local government organisations. MAV, through a partnership agreement with the Department, provides policy advice to local government and the Department, and strengthens the ongoing operation of EYM in Victoria. See www.mav.asn.au.

Municipal Early Years Plan (MEYP) – The plan that details the strategic direction for coordinating educational, care and health programs and activities, and other local developments that affect children from birth to school entry age.

Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan – A strategic plan documented and implemented by local government organisations that outlines actions to prevent or minimise public health dangers. It enables people living in the municipality to achieve maximum health and wellbeing.

My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia (MTOP)

N

National Occasional Care Programme (NOCC)

National Quality Framework (NQF) – The NQF includes the National Law, the regulations and the National Quality Standard. The NQF focuses on raising standards, and guides ongoing advances and stability in Australian education and care services. See www.acecqa.gov.au/national-quality-framework.

National Quality Standard (NQS) – The standard by which all education and care services are assessed and rated under the NQF. Services are rated as Working Towards, Meeting or Exceeding the NQS.



P

Parent Advisory Group (PAG) – The group of family members and parents that EYM organisations primarily consult with about a managed service within the EYM organisation. Membership is voluntary and open to all families whose children currently access the EYM service.

Q

Quality Assessment and Regulation Division (QARD) – The regulatory authority for education and care services in Victoria that:

- ensures the safety, health and wellbeing of children using those services
- manages the assessment and rating of services against the NQS.

QARD is a division of the Department and comprises a central office and nine area-based teams across the state.

Web

www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/regulation/Pages/default

Email

licensed.childrens.services@edumail.vic.gov.au

Phone

1300 307 415

S

Service Monitoring Framework – The framework the Department uses for monitoring service agreements with EYM organisations and standalone kindergartens.

Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)

V

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF)

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EYM organisations provide leadership and management to funded community-based kindergarten services, and to other complementary early years services.

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