

# Things you need to know about child care



## What assistance does the Australian Government provide with the cost of child care?

Child Care payments are designed to help parents, foster parents and grandparents balance their work and family commitments. The Australian Government helps families with the cost of child care through:

- Child Care Benefit (approved and registered care)
- Child Care Rebate, **and**
- Jobs, Education and Training Child Care fee assistance.

## What is Child Care Benefit?

Child Care Benefit is a payment to assist families with the cost of child care. You can claim Child Care Benefit for approved child care, registered child care, or a combination of both.

The amount of assistance you receive may vary depending on:

- the type of care you use
- your family's income
- the number of children in care, **and**
- whether you meet the work, training, study test.

## What is approved child care?

Approved child care is provided by child care services approved by the Australian Government to accept Child Care Benefit on your behalf. This means that you pay less money out of your own pocket. Approved child care includes outside school hours care, family day care, vacation care, long day care, in home care, and some occasional care services. You can ask your child care service if they are approved.

## What is registered child care?

Registered child care is child care provided by grandparents, relatives, friends or nannies who are registered as carers with the Family Assistance Office. In some circumstances it can also include care provided by individuals in private pre-schools, kindergartens and outside school hours care services. Carers or teachers in these services must be registered with the Family Assistance Office.

Child Care Benefit for registered child care is paid at a flat rate and is not income tested.

Child Care Benefit is limited to 50 hours of registered child care per week for each child. However you and your partner need to meet the work, training, study test at some time during the week to be eligible for Child Care Benefit for that week.

## How do I claim Child Care Benefit?

If you already receive Family Tax Benefit, you can claim Child Care Benefit for approved child care by calling the Family Assistance Office or by using our online claim services at [www.familyassist.gov.au](http://www.familyassist.gov.au)

If you do not receive Family Tax Benefit, to claim Child Care Benefit for approved child care, you will need to complete a paper claim form. You can request this form by calling **13 6150** or by visiting the Family Assistance Office located in Medicare offices and Centrelink Customer Service Centres.



Instead of your approved child care service accepting Child Care Benefit on your behalf, you can choose to make a lump sum claim. This means you will receive your Child Care Benefit in one payment after the end of the financial year. For lump sum claims, you need to lodge a *Claim for lump sum payment of Child Care Benefit* form within 24 months of the financial year for which you are seeking payment, or you can claim online at [www.familyassist.gov.au](http://www.familyassist.gov.au)

To claim Child Care Benefit for registered child care, you must lodge a *Claim for Child Care Benefit for registered care* form with the Family Assistance Office within 12 months of the care being provided and paid for. You will need to provide receipts for all periods you are claiming.

## What is the Child Care Rebate?

If you receive Child Care Benefit for approved child care, you may be eligible to receive the Child Care Rebate. The rebate covers some of your out-of-pocket expenses for approved child care, up to a maximum amount per child per year. Out-of-pocket expenses are the total child care fees, less your Child Care Benefit and Jobs, Education and Training Child Care fee assistance (if applicable). Total child care fees do not include administrative fees your child care service charges, such as registration fees or late payment fees.

## Who is eligible for Child Care Rebate?

To receive the Child Care Rebate, you need to be assessed as eligible for Child Care Benefit for approved child care, with the Child Care Benefit paid to your child care service or paid to you as a lump sum payment at the end of the financial year.

If your income reduces your Child Care Benefit rate to zero, you may still be eligible for the Child Care Rebate. Therefore it is important that you lodge a claim for Child Care Benefit for approved child care and have your eligibility assessed so that you can receive the Child Care Rebate.

You and your partner (if you have one) must also meet the Child Care Rebate work, training, study test requirements at some time during the week when the approved child care was provided.

**Note:** you cannot receive the Child Care Rebate for registered care.

## How do I claim Child Care Rebate?

You do not need to claim Child Care Rebate. The rebate is paid to you automatically if you are eligible for Child Care Benefit for approved child care.

If you receive Child Care Benefit for approved child care during the year, the Child Care Rebate will be paid to you at the end of each quarter (October, January and April). Your final quarter will be paid to you when you and your partner lodge your tax return/s after the end of the financial year, and any quarterly payments you received during the year have been deducted from your annual entitlement.

Instead of receiving your Child Care Rebate quarterly, you can choose to receive it as an annual payment. You need to contact the Family Assistance Office on **13 6150** to change your preference.

If you receive your Child Care Benefit for approved child care as a lump sum payment, you can only receive your Child Care Rebate as a lump sum. This will be paid to you once your and your partner's tax return/s have been lodged and your child care services have provided your attendance details to the Family Assistance Office.

## What is Jobs, Education and Training Child Care fee assistance?

Jobs, Education and Training (JET) Child Care fee assistance provides extra help with the cost of approved child care to eligible parents undertaking activities such as work, job search, training, study or rehabilitation, as part of an Employment Pathway Plan to help you enter or re-enter the workforce.

JET Child Care fee assistance can help meet the cost of child care by paying the difference between the total child care fee and the amount covered by Child Care Benefit, for care related to participation in JET Child Care fee assistance approved activities.

JET Child Care fee assistance payments are made directly to the child care service on your behalf. You will still make a small contribution towards the cost of care.

## How do I claim JET Child Care fee assistance?

You should speak to a Centrelink Customer Service Adviser who can give you an application form that provides the information you need to make a claim. Alternatively, you can contact the Family Assistance Office on **13 6150** for further information. A factsheet about JET Child Care fee assistance is also available at the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations website [www.deewr.gov.au](http://www.deewr.gov.au)

## How can I estimate my child care entitlements?

Use the Child Care Estimator to estimate any child care entitlements that you may be able to receive based on your individual circumstances. You can estimate a dollar amount for Child Care Benefit for approved child care, Child Care Rebate entitlements, and out-of-pocket child care costs.

The estimator helps you make informed decisions about child care and is available from [www.familyassist.gov.au](http://www.familyassist.gov.au), [www.centrelink.gov.au](http://www.centrelink.gov.au) and [www.mychild.gov.au](http://www.mychild.gov.au)

## How do I find an approved child care service?

The Australian Government website, [www.mychild.gov.au](http://www.mychild.gov.au), provides information to help you choose a child care service that meets your needs.

You can also call the Child Care Access Hotline, to help you find information about child care providers all over Australia. You can contact the Child Care Access Hotline on **Freecall™ 1800 670 305** (TTY Service **Freecall™ 1800 639 327**) between 8.00 am and 9.00 pm (EST) Monday to Friday.

The website and hotline will provide you with information about child care services in your area, types of child care available, vacancies, fees and the financial assistance available to help with the cost of child care.

You can find out more information about child care services and which ones are most likely to have vacancies in your local area from the Family Assistance Office.

## What should I look for when choosing a child care service?

When choosing a child care service, you should consider the service location, hours of operation, availability of places, and the cost. Equally important is the quality of care provided, that is, the relationships between staff and children, the program, the physical environment and equipment.

The National Childcare Accreditation Council administers the Australian Government's Child Care Quality Assurance systems. Child care services must participate in quality assurance to be eligible for approved Child Care Benefit approval and other government funding. Services that meet quality standards are accredited by the National Childcare Accreditation Council.

You can find information about the accreditation status of child care services, and questions to ask when looking for care, by visiting the National Childcare Accreditation Council website at [www.ncac.gov.au](http://www.ncac.gov.au), or by calling **1300 136 554**. The National Childcare Accreditation Council also handles complaints about the quality of child care services.

## Where do I go for more information?

- visit the website at [www.familyassist.gov.au](http://www.familyassist.gov.au)
- call the Family Assistance Office on **13 6150**, or
- visit the Family Assistance Office located in Medicare offices and Centrelink Customer Service Centres.

## Disclaimer

This information is accurate as at July 2010. If you use this publication after that date, please check with us that the details are current.