

Early Years workforce and infrastructure

We are seeking

Incentives to increase the number of early childhood professionals and ensure that investment in capital infrastructure keeps pace with growing demand in Warrnambool.

Our vision is for our young children and families to have access to inclusive, quality education and care facilities along with opportunities to that allow children to be happy, healthy and reach their full potential.

Workforce shortages

Demand for childcare in Warrnambool is high and Council-operated centres, which provide childcare for 362 children, have a waiting list in excess of 400.

As a consequence, kindergarten numbers are increasing due to free kindergarten and lack of childcare availability. This compels families to send their children to kindergarten earlier than expected, so parents and carers can work to meet rising cost-of-living pressures.

Council has received 543 registrations for kinder attendance in 2024, an increase on the previous year of 61, or 12.6 per cent. Council's current kindergarten numbers show 60 children will be unable to access three-year-old and four-year-old kindergarten in 2024 unless workforce issues are resolved.

We know children who start behind remain behind. We need children within Warrnambool and the South West to have the same learning opportunities as their metropolitan counterparts. Childcare availability impacts on the capacity of employers to attract and retain staff. Major organisations within Warrnambool looking for an increase in childcare provision include South West HealthCare, Gunditjmara Aboriginal Cooperative, Deakin University and South West TAFE.

While some new services are in the planning or proposal stage, additional childcare centres starting at a time of chronic staff shortages may compound the issues being experienced at existing childcare centres.

Staff may be pulled from the current staffing pool across all city/regional services, place more strain on services and decrease the capacity of existing services to meet current capacities. Services within the city have capped licensed places to manage

existing families with their current workforce. Services have capacity to take more children but unable to do so due to workforce shortages.

Funding for councils to take on more trainees, to build workforces in the sector is required. Council seeks funding that is place-based to support the workforce needs of the city.

A larger workforce will enable more families to access education and care and support families to work and enable employers to attract staff to vacant positions within the region.

Early Years infrastructure

Local Government owns 45 per cent of early years infrastructure in Victoria. Much of this infrastructure is several decades old. The market value of Victorian councils' early years infrastructure is \$3.18 billion.

The ongoing maintenance costs to councils is significant, estimated at more than \$36 million per year. The "Best Start, Best Life" reforms, rate capping, escalating construction costs and contractor shortages have further exacerbated councils' infrastructure challenges

Warrnambool City Council owns and operates 12 early childhood services with a mix of kindergartens and early learning centres. Funding is required to support council to upgrade and in some cases to build new buildings to meet the Victorian Government's early childhood education reforms. Some current buildings are not fit-for-purpose and are not designed for the extended hours of kinder children will be attending.

Without adequate funding families will not benefit from the reforms and their intended outcomes.

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