



Overview and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for Parents and Guardians

Contents

Overview	2
National Childcare Scheme	3
1. Who can benefit from the National Childcare Scheme?	3
2. What is changing for families on the National Childcare Scheme?	3
3. What will the increase in National Childcare Scheme universal subsidy mean for my family? .	4
4. When will the increase in National Childcare Scheme universal subsidy be introduced?	5
5. How much extra will I receive?	5
6. How do I apply for the National Childcare Scheme?	5
7. If I am already receiving subsidies under the National Childcare Scheme and my subsidy will change, do I need to reapply?	5
8. I am currently in receipt of a National Childcare Scheme sponsor subsidy, what do I need to do?	5
Childminding	6
9. My children go to a childminder, can I get any help with the cost of early learning and childcare?	6
Core Funding	6
10. Will the National Childcare Scheme universal subsidy be accepted by all service providers?	6
11. What actions can be taken if I believe my provider has breached the fee rules?	7
Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme	7
12. Are there any changes to the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme?	7
Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)	7
13. Will supports under the Access and Inclusion Model continue to be available?	7
14. Will AIM supports be extended beyond the ECCE programme?	7
15. How can access these extended supports?	7
Equal Participation Model	8
16. What is the Equal Participation Model (EPM)?	8
17. Who will benefit from EPM?	8
18. As a parent will I have to apply for EPM support?	8
19. What will be included in EPM?	8
Appendix 1: Increase to National Childcare Subsidies effective from September 2024	9

Overview

In 2024, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth's (DCEDIY) funding for the early learning and childcare sector will be €1.109 billion, an €83 million (8%) increase on last year's funding. The funding in 2024 provides for:

- The introduction of further enhancements to the National Childcare Scheme, with more than 150,000 unique children to benefit from changes to the minimum universal subsidy rate and the sponsorship rate, including children in childminding settings;
- The continuation of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme that will benefit more than 103,000 children in 2024;
- An increasing cohort of children with a disability availing of targeted AIM supports – approximately 7,000 - as well as additional funding to extend these supports beyond time spent in the ECCE programme, in term and out of term;
- Enhancements to Core Funding, with enhancements to the Scheme in year 3 to support improved affordability and accessibility for families, improved pay and conditions for the workforce and improved sustainability for providers, and;
- The introduction of the Equal Participation Model (EPM), whereby services will be provided with a proportionate mix of universal and targeted supports to support children and families accessing their services who are experiencing disadvantage.

Frequently Asked Questions

National Childcare Scheme

1. Who can benefit from the National Childcare Scheme?

The National Childcare Scheme helps families to meet the cost of early learning and childcare. The Scheme provides two types of subsidy for which parents can apply, for children aged over 6 months (24 weeks) and up to 15 (children aged 15 do not qualify):

- A **universal subsidy** which is not means tested; or
- An **income-assessed subsidy** which is means tested.

There is a separate NCS sponsor referral programme which allows children to be referred by certain sponsor bodies on a number of welfare grounds. Where a child is referred, there is no charge to the parent.

You cannot get the universal subsidy and an income-assessed subsidy at the same time.

Your early learning and childcare provider (this includes childminders and school-age childcare providers) must be registered with Tusla and have a National Childcare Scheme contract with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

You must apply for a subsidy, but it is paid directly to your early learning and childcare provider. Your provider then will subtract your subsidy from your bill.

2. What is changing for families on the National Childcare Scheme?

From September 2024, the minimum (universal) subsidy under the National Childcare Scheme will be €2.14 per hour. With the current minimum subsidy set at €1.40 per hour, this represents an additional €0.74 per hour off the cost of early learning and childcare.

Any family who is not already in receipt of the maximum hourly (income-assessed) subsidy under the National Childcare Scheme will see an increase in their subsidy. The maximum subsidy rates are set out in Table 1 below.

Child's age	Maximum hourly (income-assessed) subsidy
24 weeks to 12 months	€5.10
12 to 35 months	€4.35
3 years or older and not yet in school	€3.95
School-age (or 6 years to 15 years)	€3.75

Approximately 95,000 children will receive the full benefit of this change, those on an Income Assessed Subsidy will receive an hourly reduction from €0.01 to €0.74 depending on their income level. Those with below €26,000 are already in receipt of the maximum income assessed subsidy and so will see no change to their subsidies.

The National Childcare Scheme makes special arrangements for vulnerable children and families to be referred by certain sponsor bodies so they can receive free early learning and childcare.

The full cost of the early learning and childcare is paid for families who are referred to the Scheme by a sponsor body and covers an agreed amount of hours. There are 5 sponsor bodies who can make referrals, including Local Authorities, the HSE, Tusla and certain Government Departments. Each sponsor body has specific criteria for making a referral, as set out below:

- To support parents under the age of 18 years to remain in education or training through access to childcare services.
- For programme refugees, so that parents or children can access education, integration and other relevant supports.
- To promote the welfare of children who are in need of additional care or protection.
- Where there is an identified need for childcare as an additional support to the home environment to meet child development needs for a child who is under the age of 4 years.
- To support homeless persons with children that are homeless or moving out of homelessness to access childcare services.

As part of Budget 2024, hourly rates for the NCS sponsor referral programme have been increased as per the below table.

Age of child	Original Referral Rate	Updated Referral Rate
24-52 weeks	€5.87	€5.87
1-2 years	€5.00	€5.30
3+ years	€4.54	€5.30
School Age	€4.31	€5.30

3. What will the increase in National Childcare Scheme universal subsidy mean for my family?

All families who currently receive the minimum (universal) subsidy of €1.40 per hour will receive €2.14 per hour from September 2024. For these families, this translates to up to €96.30 off the weekly bill for early learning and childcare per child using 45 hours of early learning and childcare. With up to €63 currently available per week, this represents up to an additional €33.30 off weekly costs.

Families receiving more than €1.40 per hour, but less than the maximum subsidy (see Table 1) will also benefit from a subsidy increase.

The amount of increase individual families will see in their hourly subsidy will differ widely depending on their current subsidy.

4. When will the increase in National Childcare Scheme universal subsidy be introduced?

The increase will come into effect from September 2024.

5. How much extra will I receive?

A table of the changes can be found in Appendix 1, at the end of this document, or by clicking here: [Appendix 1: Increase to National Childcare Subsidies effective from September 2024](#)

6. How do I apply for the National Childcare Scheme?

All families with children under the age of 15 in Tusla-registered early learning or childcare with a National Childcare Scheme contract with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth can avail of the National Childcare Scheme. You can find more information on www.ncs.gov.ie and can apply online or by post.

If you are applying online, you will need:

- A verified MyGovID account; and
- The date of birth and Personal Public Service Number (PPSN) for each of the children you are applying for.

If you are applying by post, you will need to ring the Parent Support Centre on 01 906 8530 and request a postal application form. The Centre operates from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

7. If I am already receiving subsidies under the National Childcare Scheme and my subsidy will change, do I need to reapply?

If your application is active when the rate change takes effect, you will not need to do anything. Your rate will be automatically updated on the system. If your application expires before the rate change is applied, you should renew your application when notified as usual. Anyone with a current subsidy of less than €2.14 per hour will be raised to that amount. Other subsidy rates may also increase.

You should check that your provider has changed your co-payment to reflect the new subsidy rate, which comes into effect in September 2024.

8. I am currently in receipt of a National Childcare Scheme sponsor subsidy, what do I need to do?

Nothing changes for families currently in receipt of the sponsor subsidy, you will continue to avail of the National Childcare Scheme free of charge; the additional payment will be paid to your provider.

Childminding

9. My children go to a childminder, can I get any help with the cost of early learning and childcare?

All early learning and childcare providers who are registered with Tusla, whether centre-based or childminders working in their own homes, can take part in the National Childcare Scheme.

If your childminder is minding four or more pre-school children or seven or more children of any age, they can already register with Tusla and take part in the National Childcare Scheme.

Currently, few childminders have registered with Tusla as most childminders are outside the scope of regulations and registration. The extension of funding supports and regulation to childminders who are currently outside the scope of regulation is the focus of the National Action Plan for Childminding 2021-2028.

Work is currently under way to support the introduction of childminder-specific regulations and the extension of the National Childcare Scheme to a much wider cohort of childminders from autumn 2024, subject to legislative and regulatory changes. Legislation is currently being drafted to remove the legal exemption of childminders from regulation, and draft childminder-specific regulations will shortly be published for the purpose of public consultation.

Core Funding

10. Will the National Childcare Scheme universal subsidy be accepted by all service providers?

Participation in the National Childcare Scheme by providers is not compulsory. However, a majority of providers do offer this Scheme.

In addition, providers (other than sessional service providers) that are signed up to the Core Funding Scheme are required to offer the National Childcare Scheme (as well as the ECCE Programme). Services signed up to the Core Funding Scheme have also agreed not to increase their fees from September 2021 levels. This means that families will not be faced with fee increases, and the full affordability effects of the National Childcare Scheme, will be felt. To date, 92%, or over 4,200 providers have applied for Core Funding this year.

To find out if your provider is signed up to Core Funding, see <https://first5fundingmodel.gov.ie/together-for-better/> for the list of participating providers. Alternatively, you can contact your local City/County Childcare Committee. Contact details for each City/County Childcare Committee can be found at www.myccc.ie.

11. What actions can be taken if I believe my provider has breached the fee rules?

More than 4,200 providers signed up to the Core Funding Scheme this year have agreed not to increase their fees from September 2021 levels. This means that families will not be faced with fee increases, and the full affordability effects of the National Childcare Scheme will be felt (see <https://first5fundingmodel.gov.ie/together-for-better/> for the list of participating providers).

Where an individual identifies a case of a potential breach of the fee freeze by a provider, they may seek to have this examined and a conclusion reached through the Core Funding Fee Review process.

Further details on the Fee Review process can be found here: <https://first5fundingmodel.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Together-for-Better-Guidelines-on-Fee-Management.pdf>

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme

12. Are there any changes to the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme?

There are no changes to the ECCE programme.

Budget 2024 supports the continued implementation of the ECCE programme benefiting over 103,000 children in 2024.

Payment under this programme is by way of capitation, payable in respect of each eligible child enrolled, which are paid directly to the provider.

Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)

13. Will supports under the Access and Inclusion Model continue to be available?

The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) provides a range of targeted and universal supports to ensure children with disabilities can access and meaningfully participate in the ECCE programme. AIM supports will continue to be available in 2024.

14. Will AIM supports be extended beyond the ECCE programme?

From September 2024, children who are currently receiving AIM supports as part of the ECCE programme will be able to access AIM supports beyond the time they spend in the ECCE programme, in term and out of term.

15. How can access these extended supports?

These extended AIM supports will be accessed in a similar way to accessing current AIM supports, in partnership with your early learning and childcare provider.

Further information on AIM is available at www.aim.gov.ie.

Equal Participation Model

16. What is the Equal Participation Model (EPM)?

The Equal Participation Model (EPM) is designed to help children and their families who may be experiencing disadvantage to access and fully participate in early learning and childcare settings, through a range of supports.

A combination of universal and targeted supports will be made available.

The initial rollout of the EPM will start from September 2024.

17. Who will benefit from EPM?

EPM is designed to help children and their families who may be experiencing disadvantage to access early learning and childcare settings, through a range of supports. A combination of universal and targeted supports will be made available.

18. As a parent will I have to apply for EPM support?

No. Services will be identified using existing data. There will be no application process.

19. What will be included in EPM?

The design of the EPM is being finalised based on extensive feedback and consultations with parents, educators/practitioners, providers and representative organisations. The detail will be published in early 2024. It will seek to reflect the concerns around the additional complexity and staffing requirements of supporting the inclusion of children who may be experiencing disadvantage.

Appendix 1: Increase to National Childcare Subsidies effective from September 2024

Reckonable Income	Current Rates				Rates from September 2024			
	24-52 weeks	1 to 3 years	3 years +	School Age	24-52 weeks	1 to 3 years	3 years +	School Age
Under €26,000	€5.10	€4.35	€3.95	€3.75	€5.10	€4.35	€3.95	€3.75
€26,000.00	€5.10	€4.35	€3.95	€3.75	€5.10	€4.35	€3.95	€3.75
€27,000.00	€4.99	€4.26	€3.88	€3.68	€5.01	€4.29	€3.90	€3.70
€28,000.00	€4.88	€4.18	€3.80	€3.61	€4.93	€4.22	€3.84	€3.66
€29,000.00	€4.77	€4.09	€3.73	€3.54	€4.84	€4.16	€3.79	€3.61
€30,000.00	€4.66	€4.00	€3.65	€3.47	€4.75	€4.09	€3.74	€3.56
€31,000.00	€4.56	€3.92	€3.58	€3.40	€4.66	€4.03	€3.68	€3.51
€32,000.00	€4.45	€3.83	€3.50	€3.34	€4.58	€3.96	€3.63	€3.47
€33,000.00	€4.34	€3.74	€3.43	€3.27	€4.49	€3.90	€3.58	€3.42
€34,000.00	€4.23	€3.66	€3.35	€3.20	€4.40	€3.83	€3.52	€3.37
€35,000.00	€4.12	€3.57	€3.28	€3.13	€4.32	€3.77	€3.47	€3.32
€36,000.00	€4.01	€3.48	€3.20	€3.06	€4.23	€3.70	€3.42	€3.28
€37,000.00	€3.90	€3.40	€3.13	€2.99	€4.14	€3.64	€3.36	€3.23
€38,000.00	€3.79	€3.31	€3.05	€2.92	€4.06	€3.57	€3.31	€3.18
€39,000.00	€3.69	€3.22	€2.98	€2.85	€3.97	€3.51	€3.26	€3.13
€40,000.00	€3.58	€3.14	€2.90	€2.78	€3.88	€3.44	€3.20	€3.09
€41,000.00	€3.47	€3.05	€2.83	€2.71	€3.79	€3.38	€3.15	€3.04
€42,000.00	€3.36	€2.96	€2.75	€2.64	€3.71	€3.31	€3.10	€2.99
€43,000.00	€3.25	€2.88	€2.68	€2.58	€3.62	€3.25	€3.05	€2.95
€44,000.00	€3.14	€2.79	€2.60	€2.51	€3.53	€3.18	€2.99	€2.90
€45,000.00	€3.03	€2.70	€2.53	€2.44	€3.45	€3.12	€2.94	€2.85
€46,000.00	€2.92	€2.61	€2.45	€2.37	€3.36	€3.05	€2.89	€2.80
€47,000.00	€2.81	€2.53	€2.38	€2.30	€3.27	€2.99	€2.83	€2.76
€48,000.00	€2.71	€2.44	€2.30	€2.23	€3.18	€2.92	€2.78	€2.71
€49,000.00	€2.60	€2.35	€2.23	€2.16	€3.10	€2.86	€2.73	€2.66
€50,000.00	€2.49	€2.27	€2.15	€2.09	€3.01	€2.79	€2.67	€2.61
€51,000.00	€2.38	€2.18	€2.08	€2.02	€2.92	€2.73	€2.62	€2.57
€52,000.00	€2.27	€2.09	€2.00	€1.95	€2.84	€2.66	€2.57	€2.52
€53,000.00	€2.16	€2.01	€1.93	€1.88	€2.75	€2.60	€2.51	€2.47
€54,000.00	€2.05	€1.92	€1.85	€1.81	€2.66	€2.53	€2.46	€2.42
€55,000.00	€1.94	€1.83	€1.78	€1.75	€2.58	€2.47	€2.41	€2.38
€56,000.00	€1.84	€1.75	€1.70	€1.68	€2.49	€2.40	€2.35	€2.33
€57,000.00	€1.73	€1.66	€1.63	€1.61	€2.40	€2.34	€2.30	€2.28
€58,000.00	€1.62	€1.57	€1.55	€1.54	€2.31	€2.27	€2.25	€2.23
€59,000.00	€1.51	€1.49	€1.48	€1.47	€2.23	€2.21	€2.19	€2.19
€60,000.00	€1.40	€1.40	€1.40	€1.40	€2.14	€2.14	€2.14	€2.14
Above €60,000	€1.40	€1.40	€1.40	€1.40	€2.14	€2.14	€2.14	€2.14