

# Rural care program procedure

This is a mandated procedure under the operational policy framework. Any edits to this procedure must follow the process outlined on the [creating, updating and deleting operational policies](#) page.

## Overview

This procedure details the operating requirements for delivering a departmental rural care program, including compliance with the [Education and Care Services National Law](#), [Education and Care Services National Regulations](#) (National Law and Regulations), and [Family Assistance Law](#) (the basis for Australian Government child care fee assistance).

## Scope

This procedure applies to all departmental staff involved in the delivery or administration of a rural care program.



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# Detail

## The program

The department delivers rural care programs integrated with a government preschool in rural communities throughout South Australia. The program has a strong focus on providing care for children in communities where there are limited child care options.

The aim of the program is to:

- provide families with access to long day care, before and after preschool and school hours care and vacation care for children from birth-12 years
- enable parents to participate in work, study and non-work related activities
- promote young children's development and learning by increasing access to a high quality early childhood education and care program.

## Operating requirements

A rural care program can only operate where there is physical capacity in the preschool to accommodate the program. The priority for use of the preschool service is the delivery of the preschool program. The maximum size of a rural care program is a 3-worker program.

Department rural care programs are to provide 10 hours of care per day and operate for 50 weeks of the year.

The program's operational hours and 10 closure days in the December - January vacation period will be determined by the site leader in consultation with the preschool management committee or school governing council, to best support the needs of the community.

Site leaders may apply to the education director for additional closure days during the December – January vacation period, noting that the program must operate for a minimum of 48 weeks per year to comply with Australian Government requirements. The Manager, Preschool Policy and Programs must be notified of the request and outcome. Site leaders must also notify the rural care administration officer of the program closure, to ensure that families are not charged for the closure day, and that it is reported to the Australian Government in accordance with funding requirements.

## Maintaining and increasing places in a rural care program

The base resource allocation for a rural care program is a single worker for 11 hours a day, which equates to 55 hours a week.

The number of rural care workers and therefore places allocated to the rural care program, is dependent on:

- the physical capacity of the site
- the number of children enrolled in the preschool program

- demonstrated demand
- financial viability.

Rural care programs must be financially viable. To be financially viable, a rural care program must maintain the following average full-time equivalent (FTE) utilisation:

- a single worker program operating for 5 days per week must maintain an average utilisation of 4.0 FTE
- a 2-worker program operating for 5 days per week must maintain an average utilisation of 10.0 FTE
- a 3-worker program operating for 5 days per week must maintain an average utilisation of 16.0 FTE.

Programs may operate with a combination of 1, 2 or 3 workers depending on the demand for care, preschool enrolments and site physical capacity.

Where a single worker program falls below an average budgeted utilisation of 4.0 FTE children for 6 continuous months, the site leader will be advised that the program is under review and may be closed if there is no evidence that the utilisation will increase in the short term.

Where a 2 or 3 worker falls below the average budgeted utilisation for 6 continuous months the site leader will be advised the program is under review and the number of workers may be reduced if there is no evidence utilisation will increase.

When a request is made for additional rural care places, the Preschool Program and Policy Unit will assess the request taking into consideration the preschool enrolment data (including projected enrolments), the rural care program's utilisation history, and future demand for care before approving additional places.

## After preschool care

Where there is sufficient demand for an after preschool care program, which may include caring for school age children, an additional worker may be approved (up to a maximum of a 3-worker program) subject to the program having the physical capacity to accommodate the additional children and meeting financial viability requirements.

## Educator to child ratios

### Single worker

Programs operating as a single-worker program may care for up to 7 children, of which no more than 4 are under school age.

### Two and three workers

The total number of children who may be cared for in a 2 or 3 worker program will depend on the ages of children and the required educator-to-child ratio. Site leaders must ensure that rural care educator-to-child ratios below are complied with at all times:

- from birth up to 24 months – 1:4

- for children over 24 months and less than 36 months – 1:5
- for children aged 36 months or over (not including school aged children) – 1:10.

## Mixed age groups

Mixed age groups of children must have the educator-to-child ratios calculated according to the ratio requirements for the youngest child. For example, 1 child under 24 months and 3 children over 36 months will be staffed based on the 1:4 educator-to-child ratio. This means that on occasions older children, including school aged children, may be included in the educator to youngest child ratio requirements.

The rural care staffing calculator can help rural care educators working with mixed age group programs to identify the required number of educators.

## Caring for children in an emergency

Within existing staffing, an additional child (or 2 or more children from the same family) may be cared for in an emergency for a period of not more than 2 consecutive days, in accordance with the requirements outlined under the National Regulations (refer to Regulation 123 (5) and (6)). The site leader must be satisfied on reasonable grounds, that this will not affect the health, safety and wellbeing of all the children attending the program.

An Incident Response Management System (IRMS) report must be lodged to enable the Early Childhood Services Directorate to notify the Education Standards Board in accordance with the National Regulations (refer to Regulation 175 (2) (ca) (i) and (ii)). The report should include a description of the emergency and a statement confirming that the program has taken into account the health, safety and wellbeing of all the children attending the program.

## Staff qualifications

Site leaders must ensure compliance with departmental staffing policies. Contact People and Culture Division in relation to all staffing matters ([education.HR@sa.gov.au](mailto:education.HR@sa.gov.au)).

The following qualification requirements apply to workers employed in rural care programs:

- Single worker program – minimum qualification of a Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care.
- Two worker program – the first worker must have a minimum qualification of a Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care and the second worker must have, or be actively working towards, either a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care or a Certificate III in Education Support.
- Three worker program – two workers must have a minimum qualification of a Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care and the third worker must have, or be actively working towards, either a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care or a Certificate III in Education Support.

For more information regarding qualifications required for early childhood workers (ECWs) employed in the rural care program, refer to [early childhood \(EC\) reform fact sheet 2\(b\) \(PDF 480KB\)](#).

Where an appropriately qualified ECW is not available using the departmental recruitment and selection procedures, the National Law (Section 94) provides for the application of a Service Waiver or a temporary

waiver. The site leader must contact People and Culture Division for advice (refer to [EC reform fact sheet 5 \(PDF 202KB\)](#)).

## Salary allocation

Grants for salaries will be provided through the preschool's resource entitlement statement (RES). The allocation of staff hours is based on:

- a program operating for 10 hours per day, 5 days per week
- the employment of staff to cover 2 shifts (inclusive of a 30-minute hand over period).

A single worker program is allocated 55 hours per week to cover child contact time. Three additional staff hours per week are provided at an ECW2 rate for the primary ECW to complete child records and programming making the total allocation 58 hours per week.

For each day that the program operates as a 2-worker program, an additional 11 ECW hours is allocated.

The following project codes must be used for approved staffing appointments:

- ECWs – 738
- Relief staff (ECW) – 320
- Contracted relief staff (ECW) to support children with a disability – 320.

## Additional staffing considerations

Where a rural care program does not operate at the same time as the preschool program, the site leader must ensure that department policies and procedures, and the National Regulation requirements are met with particular consideration to:

- an identified supervisor (also known as a responsible person) being present at all times that the program is operating (refer to [EC reform fact sheet 8 \(PDF 421KB\)](#))
- an educator with first aid qualifications (ie an approved first aid qualification, anaphylaxis management training and emergency asthma management training) being in attendance and immediately available in an emergency, in accordance with the National Regulations (Refer to Regulation 136)
- complying with the [safety management procedure](#) and implementing the risk controls outlined in the [working alone or in isolation](#) health and safety risks page.

## Enrolments, bookings and attendance

### Australian Government child care assistance

Families are to be informed about the availability of Australian Government child care subsidy (CCS) payments to assist with the cost of child care and directed to the [Department of Human Services – Centrelink CCS](#) for information.

Families are able to lodge an application for CCS through [Centrelink – how to claim CCS](#).

Where possible, advice regarding eligibility for child care assistance should be sought by a family prior to a booking being processed.

Site leaders must ensure that the parent and child's customer reference number (CRN) are included on the child's enrolment form (Form I) to enable CCS to be claimed.

## Priority of access

Aligned with the Australian Government's recommendation for managing childcare places, priority will be given to children who are:

- at risk of serious abuse or neglect
- a child of a sole parent who satisfies, or parents who both satisfy, the activity test through paid employment.

When there is more demand for care than available places, consideration should be given to the priority of access criteria outlined in the [placement procedure \(PDF 322KB\)](#).

If the program is under significant pressure for places, the site leader must carefully assess requests, and consult with their education director and early childhood leader where appropriate.

There are some circumstances in which a child who is already in a child care program may be required to change their booked care place or leave the program.

When a program has no vacant child care places and is providing child care for a child who does not meet any of the priority of access criteria outlined above, the program may require that child to change their booked care place or leave the child care program, in order for the program to provide a place for a higher priority child, but only if both of the following conditions are met:

- the person who is liable to pay child care fees in respect of the child was notified when the child first occupied the child care place that the program followed this procedure
- the program gives that person at least 14 days' notice of the requirement for the child to change their booked care place or to leave the child care program.

## Children with a disability

Children with disability may be eligible for assistance through the Australian Government funded Inclusion Support program (ISP). This may include funding to engage an additional staff member to increase the educator-to-child ratio to support the inclusion of eligible children.

Gowrie SA is the Inclusion Agency (IA) for South Australia. Information about the program is available from [Gowrie SA Inclusion Agency](#) (phone 1800 129 606 or 8234 5219).

Programs requiring inclusion support for a child must complete a request for service form and return the completed form to [inclusion@GowrieSA.org.au](mailto:inclusion@GowrieSA.org.au).

For further information, contact the Child Care Services Team (phone 8226 2032 or email [education.ChildcareServices@sa.gov.au](mailto:education.ChildcareServices@sa.gov.au)).



## Enrolment and immunisation requirements

A child must not be enrolled in or attend rural care without a current immunisation record. At the time of enrolling in rural care, parents or guardians need to provide a copy of their child's current immunisation record that shows that the child's immunisation is up-to-date or on a catch-up schedule with a future end date, or evidence that their child has an approved exemption from the Chief Public Health Officer.

Ongoing evidence must be provided in accordance with the advice provided on the [immunisation requirements and early childhood services](#) page.

Before a child attends the program an integrated services enrolment form (form I) must be completed.

Before a booking is accepted, a rural care fee schedule must be signed. Also discuss the following with the family:

- fee schedule
- priority of access criteria
- booking and cancellation requirements.

The enrolment form together with a booked care contract or casual care agreement must be forwarded to the rural care administration officer at least 5 business days prior to the intended first day of care. An enrolment will then be created and submitted to Centrelink, for the parent to confirm prior to care commencing.

The rural care administration officer will forward a complying written arrangement (CWA) which the family must accept prior to care commencing to ensure compliance with the Family Assistance Law. The rural care administrator will advise the site leader when the family have accepted the CWA.

Where there is a waiting list, families will be invited to complete the rural care waiting list.

An enrolment with Centrelink will cease when a child has not attended a session of care for a number of continuous weeks, as specified by the Australian Government child care assistance requirements (refer to the [Child Care Provider Handbook](#)). Before care can be provided, the service must provide the rural care administration officer with at least 24 hours' notice to ensure that new enrolment details can be submitted to Centrelink and care arrangements re-established, which parents must confirm.

## Booking care

When a child commences care, the family must have signed either a [booked care contract \(PDF 317KB\)](#) or a [casual care agreement \(PDF 360KB\)](#).

A booked care contract ensures that a place is retained for the child on an ongoing basis. When a permanent change to a booked care arrangement is requested, 14 days' notice is required and another contract must be completed.

A casual care contract is used when care is required on an ad hoc basis subject to availability. Casual care can only be booked 1 week in advance. If there is a consistent pattern of care a booked care contract is to be established.

## Cancellation of booked care

Fourteen days written notice is required from a family to cancel booked care and a [notification of changes form \(PDF 346KB\)](#) needs to be completed. In the event that 14 days' notice is not given, absent sessions will be charged at the full fee rate.

## Absences

Families that are eligible for child care subsidy (CCS) are allocated 42 absence days from the Australian Government for each child per financial year. These absences can be used for any reason. Absences will be charged for booked care on public holiday closures.

The program offers 10 days per calendar year when a family can elect to be charged at a reduced rate of 50% of the standard session fee. This fee is eligible for CCS. The family can elect to use these 10 days for family holidays, appointments and for public holidays. A [notification of changes form \(PDF 346KB\)](#) must be completed to request the reduced fee. These absences are not in addition to the 42 absence days allocated by the Australian Government.

All rural care programs close for 10 days over the Christmas / New Year period. During this time no fees will be charged, including for public holidays falling at the beginning or end of the closure period.

## Attendance records

An attendance record, including the actual time of arrival and departure must be made on a daily basis and retained at the program.

During the enrolment process the rural care administration officer will provide parents and persons authorised to deliver/collect a child with a registered personal identification number (PIN), enabling use of an electronic signature to sign children in and out of the service on arrival and departure.

Site leaders and educators will be allocated a PIN which can be used in the following circumstances:

- recording a child as absent
- when educators are delivering or collecting children between preschool and school
- one-off circumstances where the parent or legal guardian is unable to deliver/collect the child and has provided authorisation for a person to deliver/collect the child
- emergency situations.

In circumstances where the site leader or educator use their PIN (other than absences or educator delivering/collecting children) a note explaining the reason for using the PIN must be entered with the e-signature.

Site leaders must ensure a record of the child's daily attendance is available for emergency and evacuation processes.

If a parent/guardian, authorised person or staff member loses or forgets their PIN, the rural care business administrator must be contacted so that the PIN can be reissued.

## Statements of entitlement

The rural care business administrator will issue a 'statement of entitlement' to parents eligible for CCS each fortnight. This statement details start and end times for each session of care, the actual fee and any fee reduction amounts.

## Fees

### Fee charging

Families are required to pay for all care including care booked on public holidays. These fees are fully recoverable and are subject to departmental debt collection processes. The fee payment processes are to be discussed with families prior to enrolment. A family is required to sign the rural care [fee schedule \(PDF 199KB\)](#) to acknowledge and agree to fee payment responsibilities prior to a booking being accepted.

### Fee schedule

The Rural Care program is a not-for-profit service and the fees are set to cover the cost of delivering the program. All departmental rural care programs must apply the standard program fee schedule. This schedule must be given to families and displayed in a prominent position at the site.

The department will review the fees on an annual basis and a new [fee schedule \(PDF 199KB\)](#) implemented at the beginning of a financial year. Families are to be provided with at least 1 months' notice of any changes to the fee schedule, and must sign the new fee schedule prior to a booking being accepted.

### Fee payment method

The preferred payment of child care fees is via BPAY® as detailed on invoices. In instances where a family is unable to use BPAY®, they may negotiate an alternative payment method with the site leader.

### Payment date

Payments are due and payable on receipt of invoice. Families may apply to the site leader to vary this arrangement and make regular alternative payments at specified times as documented in a signed payment plan.

### Invoices

Families will receive their first tax invoice in the fortnight following commencement of care. An invoice will include an opening balance, fees charged, less CCS payments received, and a closing balance.

The tax invoice will also include a statement of child attendance for the period of care charged and the accrued number of child absences for the financial year.

Invoices will be emailed where an email address is provided or posted to a mailing address.

### Overdue fees

Where an account is overdue by 30 days or more and there is no [negotiated outstanding fee payment plan](#)

[\(NOFPP\) \(PDF 343KB\)](#) in place, the following statement will be placed on the invoice:

According to our records, your account appears to be overdue. If payment has been made thank you, if it hasn't, please organise to make a payment within 7 days. If you are having difficulty paying the account please contact the centre director for assistance.

If a family is unable to meet fee payments, they may apply to the site leader to enter into a signed NOFPP. This plan will focus on clearing the outstanding debt together with meeting payments for ongoing care, allowing care to continue to be provided.

## Debt collection

Families with fees that are 60 days in arrears without a NOFPP in place will receive an 'initial letter of demand' with a copy of the most recent invoice requesting payment within 14 days. The letter will include notification that care may cease, and that the debt will be referred to the department's Accounts Client Services if a payment is not made. Following advice from the Rural Care Administration Officer, the site leader is to approach the family to determine if extenuating circumstances apply and as appropriate negotiate a NOFPP.

If a family has ceased care with an outstanding debt remaining, an invoice request will be raised for the debt to be referred to the department's Accounts Client Services for collection (phone 8226 0097 or email [education.AccountsClientServices@sa.gov.au](mailto:education.AccountsClientServices@sa.gov.au)).

## Final notice

If there is no response to the 'initial letter of demand' or payment received, and a NOFPP has not been established, a 'final notice letter' requesting payment within 7 days will be sent to the account holder.

If the debt is not resolved by the above measures, or payments are not made as per the NOFPP arrangement, the rural care administration officer will send a 'cessation of care' letter and raise an invoice request for the debt to be referred to the department's Accounts Client Services for collection.

If care is terminated, the family will only be able to access care when the debt has been paid in full. The family will be placed on the waiting list if no place is immediately available.

## Program closures and child or pupil free days

Site leaders must provide families with at least 4 weeks' notice prior to the closure of a program, except in unforeseen circumstances due to an emergency.

Rural care programs will continue to operate on preschool or school child /pupil free days to ensure continuity of care arrangements for families.

Where a child/pupil free day is required due to exceptional circumstances, the education director must approve the closure of the rural care program. The application to the education director is to outline:

- the rationale for the closure of the program
- an explanation of why the program s cannot operate with relief staff
- where possible, alternative care arrangements for families.

In the event of an unplanned or emergency closure, an [Incident Response Management System \(IRMS\) report](#) must be lodged to enable the Early Childhood Services Directorate to notify the Education Standards Board in accordance with the National Regulations (Regulation 175 (2) (b) and (c)). The report is to include a description of the emergency and a statement confirming that the program has taken into account the health, safety and wellbeing of all the children attending the service.

Site leaders must also notify the Rural Care Administration Officer of all program closures, to ensure that families are not charged for the closure day, and that it is reported to the Australian Government in accordance with funding requirements.

## Ceasing a rural care service

Prior to closing a rural care program, the program will be reviewed in consultation with the education director or their delegate. A report on the program's future operations will be prepared for the Executive Director Early Years and Child Development, recommending either closure or an extension of the review period.

## Roles and responsibilities

### Head of the Office for the Early Years

Approved provider responsibilities under the Education and Early Childhood Services (Registration and Standards) Act 2011.

### Director, Early Childhood Services and Strategy

Endorse the rural care program procedure.

### Manager and Principal Program Officer, Child Care Services

Oversee the rural care program.

Manage the rural care budget, including developing an annual budget.

Ensure compliance with the Australian Government reporting requirements.

Review the program fee schedule on an annual basis.

Recommend the expansion of a program to a 2 worker or 3 worker model in collaboration with the education director and site leader.

Monitor, evaluate and review implementation of the procedure.

Provide advice to early childhood leaders, and as required, site leaders, staff and governing councils on the rural care program procedure.

## Rural care administration officer

Ensure accurate and timely data entry of attendances.

Maintain family records.

Process and report on account payments.

Administer family childcare accounts.

Ensure CCS claims meet auditing requirements.

Implement overdue fee collection processes (issuing initial letter of demand, final notice and cessation of care letters).

Provide statistical reports.

## Education director

Provide advice on the establishment and closure of program to meet the needs of communities.

Approve program closures and child/pupil free days.

## Early childhood leader

Provide advice to site leaders to ensure compliance with this procedure.

Notify the Preschool Policy and Programs Unit of any concerns relating to the implementation of the procedure or program outcomes.

## Site leader

Ensure the efficient management and operation of the rural care program in accordance with this procedure and compliance with relevant departmental policies and procedures.

Ensure the program complies with the Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations.

Monitor program utilisation and adjust operations to ensure program viability.

Delegate administrative functions to rural care educators.

Recruit rural care educators.

Promote the rural care program to parents and the broader community and encourage the involvement of families in all aspects of the program's operations.

## Rural care educators

Provide education and care programs consistent with this procedure.

Implement administrative activities as delegated by the site leader.

# Definitions

## at risk of serious abuse or neglect

The Australian Government Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS) (child wellbeing) defines a child to be at risk of serious abuse or neglect if the child is at risk of suffering harm as a result of being subject to, or exposed to, one or more of the following events:

- serious physical, emotional or psychological abuse
- sexual abuse
- domestic or family violence
- neglect.

A child is at risk if either of the following apply:

- the child is currently experiencing one or more of the events set out above
- the risk of the child experiencing one or more of the events in the future is real and apparent.

A child may be taken to be at risk of suffering harm in relation to an event mentioned above, even if the event occurred in the past.

A child is also taken to be at risk of serious abuse or neglect where the child is in need of care and protection under relevant state or territory law.

Source: [Family Assistance Guide](#).

## child care subsidy

Australian Government financial assistance to families towards the costs of approved child care.

## educator to child ratios

Educator to child ratios required under the rural care procedure:

- from birth up to 24 months: 1:4
- for children over 24 months and less than 36 months: 1:5
- for children aged 36 months or over (not including children over preschool age): 1:10.

If the children are of mixed ages, the minimum number of educators for the children must meet the above ratios at all times.

## responsible person

A responsible person may be a nominated supervisor or a person in day-to-day charge of the program who has given written consent to undertake this role. A responsible person must be present at a program at all

times that the program is educating and caring for children.

## school age child

A child who is enrolled in or registered with a school, or has reached 6 years of age.

## site leader

Preschool director, school principal.

## utilisation

The daily child full time equivalent (1.0 FTE) is 10 hours of booked care. This may be made up by 1 or more children.

# Policy information

## Supporting information

[Child care subsidy information for families](#)

[Gowrie SA Inclusion Agency brochure \(PDF 3.9MB\)](#)

[Camps and excursions](#)

[Immunisation requirements and early childhood services](#)

[Critical incidents, Injury, and hazard reporting](#)

[Preschool policies, procedures and national regulations](#)

## Fact sheets

[Early childhood \(EC\) reform fact sheet 2\(b\) \(PDF 480KB\)](#) – qualifications required for early childhood workers (ECWs) and school services officers (SSOs) in Department for Education occasional care and rural care programs

[EC reform fact sheet 5 \(PDF 202KB\)](#) – applying for a waiver to employ staff who are not qualified to work in a preschool, rural care and occasional care services

[EC reform fact sheet 4a \(PDF 484 KB\)](#) – approved emergency relief early childhood workers (ECWs)/school based preschool school services officers (SSOs) in preschools, rural care and occasional care services behind an ECW/SSO absent because of short term illness or leave

[EC reform fact sheet 8 \(PDF 421KB\)](#) – nominated supervisor



## Forms and agreements

[Fee schedule \(PDF 199KB\)](#)

[Integrated services enrolment form \(PDF 973KB\)](#)

[Notification of changes form – rural care program \(PDF 346KB\)](#)

[Booked care contract – rural care program \(PDF 317KB\)](#)

[Casual care agreement – rural care program \(PDF 360KB\)](#)

[Account payment plan – rural care program \(PDF 326KB\)](#)

[Negotiated outstanding fee payment plan – rural care program \(PDF 343KB\)](#)

## Related legislation

[A New Tax System \(Family Assistance\) Act 1999 \(Cth\)](#)

[A New Tax System \(Family Assistance\) \(Administration\) Act 1999 \(Cth\)](#)

[Education and Care Services National Regulations](#)

[Family Assistance Legislation Amendment \(Jobs for Families Child Care Package\) Act 2017 \(Cth\)](#)

[Education and Early Childhood Services \(Registration and Standards\) Act 2011, Schedule 1 Education and Care Services National Law \(South Australia\)](#)

[South Australian Public Health Act 2011 \(SA\)](#)

## Related policies

[Acceptance and refusal of authorisations policy \(PDF 150KB\)](#)

[Reporting critical incidents, injuries, hazards and near misses procedure \(PDF 233KB\)](#)

[Preschool attendance recording procedure \(PDF 157KB\)](#)

[Safety management procedure](#)

## Record history

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## Approvals

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Policy Officer: Principal Program Officer, Child Care Services

Policy sponsor: Manager, Child Care Services  
Responsible Executive Director: Head of the Office for the Early Years  
Approved by: Director, Early Childhood Services and Strategy  
Approved date: 30 March 2022  
Next review date: 30 March 2025

## Revision record

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Amendment(s): Updated contact details and responsibility.

Version: 1.3

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Version: 1.1

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Amendment(s): The procedure replaces information previously contained in the 'rural care guidelines' and 'rural care enrolment and fee payment policy'.

Version: 3.0

Approved by: Executive Director, Early Childhood Services  
Approved date: 28 December 2012  
Review date: November 2014  
Amendment(s): Guideline developed to replace the rural care handbook.

# Contact

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