



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Education,  
Skills and Employment**

# **COVID-19 FAQs for the Inclusion Support Program**

**9 April 2020**





## Claiming Inclusion Development Fund Payments during the Early Child Education and Care Relief Package Arrangements

### How do I claim Inclusion Development Fund payments without submitting attendance records in the Child Care Subsidy System?

There has been a system change in the Inclusion Support Portal to facilitate ISP payments during the Relief Package Arrangements. There is no change to the actual allowable non-face-to-face hours in each case. Services are only eligible for IDF for the hours of actual attendance and the approved number of non-face-to-face hours as set out in their funding letter, per Section 11.1.1 of the Inclusion Support Program Guidelines.

For care provided from 6 April 2020, services should claim all Inclusion Development Fund (IDF) claims hours as 'non-face-to-face' hours, including the actual attendance of the case child and approved non-face-to-face hours.

The department has changed the Inclusion Support Portal to notionally increase the 'Additional non-face-to-face hours' for each case to allow services to claim IDF payments without the attendance records in the Child Care Subsidy System.

If services receive an error when claiming they should seek advice from their child care software provider or contact the Inclusion Development Fund Manager ([idfmanager@ku.com.au](mailto:idfmanager@ku.com.au)).

Services will still need to record attendance, and these will be checked by the department to verify IDF claims. The department will also be monitoring claim patterns.

Services can continue to submit new applications for Inclusion Support Program funding under the updated ISP Guidelines that were published on 30 March 2020.

This IDF payment mechanism is expected to be in place for the duration of the Early Childhood Education and Care Relief Package arrangements.

### How will the department ensure that Inclusion Development Funds are being appropriately claimed?

Inclusion Professionals will regularly connect to services to confirm the attendance of IDF case children and the educator to child ratios.

The department will monitor the claiming patterns of all services and investigate any anomalies.

The department will also access attendance records of services and reconcile that with reported children's attendance from parent surveys.



## Changes in care environments with current approvals for IDF Subsidy

The service has an approved IDF subsidy case and the child is not attending the service due to the risk to their health. Do we need to submit a change of circumstance case if more than one child approved, or Final Review Form if there is only one child approved?

If a child is currently not attending the service due to COVID-19 the service does not need to take any action in relation to their IDF Subsidy approval for Additional Educator. It is anticipated that many children will return to services in the future. Services should ensure that they only claim IDF Subsidy for the hours where additional support is needed, which may be for less hours than approved, particularly where the approval includes more than one child. It is important to note that the Additional Educator is an extra educator employed to work in the care environment above the educator to child ratio requirements based on the ages of children attending.

The number of children attending the service is reducing at the service. An example: We have joined two groups of 3-5 years old's and have 15 children and 2 educators. There is an approved IDF subsidy case and the child with additional needs still attends. Can the service still claim IDF subsidy when attendance numbers are low if they are still employing an additional educator?

The service can continue to employ an Additional Educator and claim IDF, despite reduced children attending the care environment, when the following applies:

- this additional support is required to address the barriers to inclusion; and
- the service continues to employ the Additional Educator in the care environment as an extra educator above the educator to child ratio requirements for the ages of children attending, as per the National Regulations.

The service should email the Inclusion Agency and the IDFM to advise of these arrangements. In most instances, email advice will suffice without the need to submit a change of circumstances.



## My service is closing. Can services receive an extension of time to their current IDF Subsidy approval period?

If your service has a current IDF Approval your Approval can be reactivated by the IDFM when your service reopens. Please check the approval end date of your current IDF approval. If when your service reopens the approval period has ended, contact your Inclusion Professional (IP) for support with submitting a renewal application. The IP can email the IDFM, at this time, for your application to be prioritised for assessment by the IDFM.

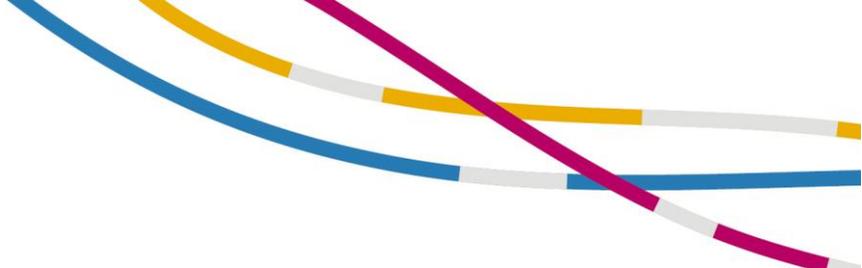
## My vacation care service is operating for additional weeks this year due to COVID-19. How do I apply for additional weeks of IDF Subsidy for an Additional Educator?

The department is temporarily increasing the maximum number of weeks which can be approved for services offering vacation care for any IDF Subsidy case. A service can apply at any time during the 12-month approval period to increase the number of funded weeks, if the service is open for additional weeks due to changes to school holiday periods and IDF Subsidy during these additional vacation care weeks is required. The service copies the current IDF case and makes a request for additional weeks in the notes tab due to extended vacation care periods during 2020. This request can be made at any time during the service's current IDF approval period, when additional weeks of funded support are required due to changes school holiday periods as a result of COVID 19. This will allow the service to apply for additional weeks now or later in the year when the additional weeks for the current approval period are needed.

If the care environment requires a different level of support than the existing IDF approval, the service must submit a change of circumstances application, following the processes outlined in Section 7.6 of the ISP Guidelines.

## My vacation care service is operating for additional pupil free days this year due to COVID-19. How do I apply for Pupil free days under IDF Subsidy for an Additional Educator?

A service can apply at any time during the 12-month approval period to increase the number of pupil free days, if the service is open for the additional pupil free days and IDF Subsidy is required. The department is temporarily increasing the maximum number of pupil free days to 20 for any IDF case approved until 30 June 2020.



## New Applications

A service has been completing a new case for IDF Subsidy for an Additional Educator and the number of children attending are low due to the COVID-19. Should the case be submitted, if so, how will this impact on the approval of the case?

The service should discuss their current need for an Additional Educator in the care environment with the Inclusion Professional (IP). The service and the IP will discuss the strategies and actions outlined in the Strategic Inclusion Plan to determine if an increased educator to child ratio is needed to implement these to address the barriers to inclusion. This could mean that the service submits the application now or waits to submit the application when IDF Subsidy is needed in the future.

The case has been submitted for endorsement, but the children will not be attending the service because of the risk to the child's health, should the case be submitted for approval?

If IDF Subsidy is not required at this time the IS Case should be returned to a status of started. This will enable the service to review the need for IDF Subsidy in line with any changes in the care environment and update the case and/or Strategic Inclusion Plan (SIP) when IDF Subsidy is needed in the future. Services should contact their Inclusion Professional as soon as they know when this additional support will be needed for any assistance with reviewing their application.

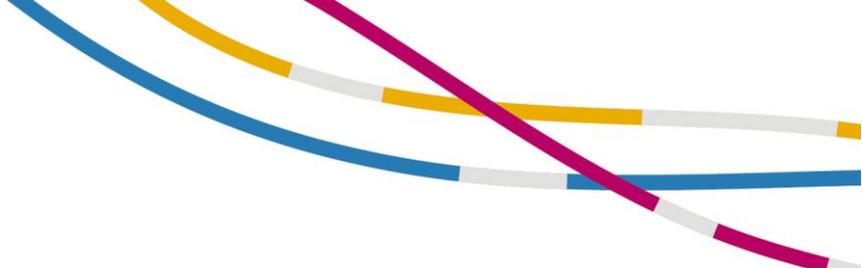
Should services do renewals if the child is not attending due to the risk to their health?

If IDF Subsidy for an Additional Educator is not needed in a care environment due to children not attending, or other reasons related to COVID-19, the service is not required to submit a renewal application. The service can submit an application at a later time when this additional support is required.

## Immediate/Time-Limited Support

A child is approved on an Immediate/Time-Limited Support case and has reduced days due to the parents' concerns regarding their health. The case is approved two days a week and the child is attending only one day. Can the service claim one day a week over funding approval period?

Yes, services can claim less hours than were approved in relation to Immediate/Time-Limited Support or Additional Educator. Please note the approval period will remain the same, as outlined in the Approval Letter.



Our service has an Immediate/Time-Limited approval, but the child is now not starting at the service. We expect them to return later in the year.

Please email the IDFM to notify of this situation. Due to COVID-19, the start and end date can be adjusted, if this additional support is still required at a later date. When the child returns please notify the IDFM via email and the start and end date of this Immediate/Time-Limited case can be adjusted. The IDFM will re issue an Approval Letter for the updated approval period.

## **Innovative Solutions Support**

Our services can't complete our Innovative Solutions project. Can we extend the date of our approval, so we can complete it later in the year?

When a service expects to complete a project, but the project is delayed due to reasons such as availability of Innovative provider, and/or the service not currently accepting visits or not conducting team meetings/events, an extension can be requested. In this case, the service or IP can email the IDFM [idfminnovative@ku.com.au](mailto:idfminnovative@ku.com.au) to request an extension to the end date of the approval. The request email should state a specific end date, or number of extra weeks or months that the service needs to complete the project. Generally, the IDFM will approve extensions of up to six months.

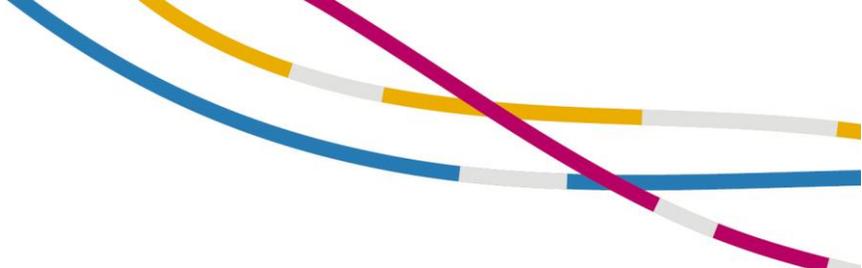
The IDFM will adjust the end date of the approval and send an email to the IP and service to confirm this change to the end date. Both the service and the IP should be copied in to all emails about extensions to Innovative Solution approvals to facilitate communication.

Our service has an Innovative Solutions Support approval, but we are not sure if the project can go ahead. What do we do?

The service and the IP should decide on a future date in 2020, when they will revisit this project, or discuss an alternate project that will help the service to address the barriers to inclusion. The service should notify the IDFM via email [idfminnovative@ku.com.au](mailto:idfminnovative@ku.com.au). This proposed date should be included in the email to the IDFM. Both the service and the IP should be copied in to all emails about extensions to Innovative Solution approvals to facilitate communication.

Generally, the IDFM will approve extensions of up to six months.

The service and IP can email the IDFM with the proposed alternate Innovative Solutions project or recommencement of the original project when this is known. This email would include an overview of the changes, proposed timeframe for the project, confirmation that the project and/or adjustments would address the service's barriers to inclusion, and if a new Innovative provider is being used, a quote from this provider. The IDFM will send confirmation that all the information needed has been received, uploaded into the IS Portal and confirm commencement of adjusted project.



## Can Inclusion Professionals (IPs) play a more active role in helping services to design Innovative Solutions projects during COVID-19 to help build educator resilience and continue supporting the inclusion of children with additional needs?

Yes, the department encourages IPs to provide intensive support through the COVID-19 pandemic (if required) to help services design projects that will support the inclusion of a child or children and build educator skills, knowledge and confidence (including resilience). Any additional assistance provided by IPs in the design of projects should be recorded in the Notes tab for transparency.

### **Claims for IDF Subsidy**

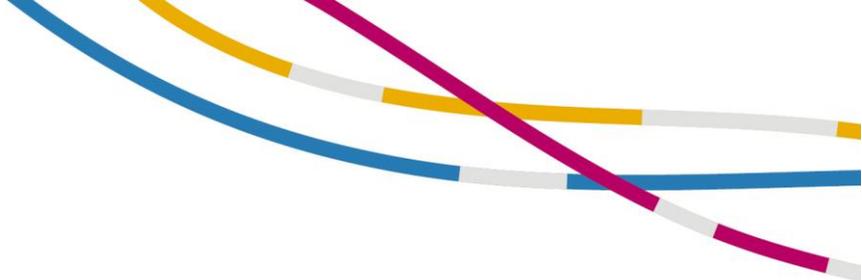
## Due to declining enrolments and attendance of children my service will be combining care environments. Is it okay to continue to claim IDF which is approved for one care environment?

If the change is due to COVID-19, the service is not required to submit a change of circumstance application at this time. An Additional Educator should only be employed, and IDF Subsidy claimed, when:

- this additional support is required in the care environment to address the barriers to inclusion; and
- the service continues to employ the Additional Educator in the care environment as an extra educator above the educator to child ratio requirements for the ages of children attending, as per the National Regulations.

## With the upcoming vacation care, can we claim non-face-to-face hours if we know the child is not attending?

Where a child is absent from the service, the educator funded by the IDF Subsidy for Immediate/ Time-Limited support or Additional Educator should receive appropriate notice in line with award (or Enterprise Agreement) provisions. The service is able to claim the subsidy for a limited number of hours during its approval period, where the child is absent, but the Additional Educator attends the care environment, as set out in the Approval Letter.



If a child in an approved IDF subsidy case is not attending the service because of the risk to their health and the case goes to a status of inactive, do we need to submit a change of circumstance case when the child returns? Can the service not make any claims against the case and just request that the case be reactivated when the child starts to attend again?

The service should review the IDF Subsidy approval period outlined in the Approval Letter. If the child is absent for an extended period and returns to the service, the service can email the IDFM to request reactivation of the IDF Subsidy approval, if the Approval Period has not ended. The service will be able to claim IDF in line with the Approval and the Conditions of Funding.

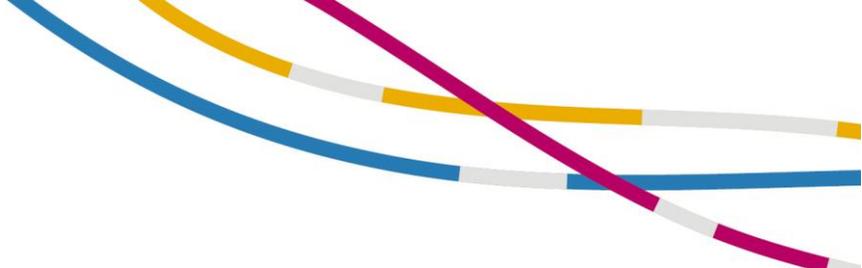
When there are two children in a care environment and the environment receives funding of 8 hours and one of the children in that care environment is away do we continue to claim 8 hours or claim 5 hours? From the guidelines and approval letter I believe we can continue to claim the 8 hours.

The service can continue to claim all IDF hours approved, in line with the Approval Letter and Conditions of Funding. If the change to children's attendances was an ongoing change a service is required to submit a change of Circumstance application in this instance. However, if the change is due to COVID-19, the service is not required to submit a change of circumstance application at this time. An Additional Educator should only be employed, and IDF Subsidy claimed, when this additional support is required in the care environment.

Will non-face-to-face hours be increased because of COVID-19?

The number of hours approved for when the child is absent, but the Additional Educator is employed is outlined in the Approval Letter, as non-face-to-face hours. Where a child is absent from the service, the educator funded by the IDF Subsidy for Immediate/Time-Limited support or Additional Educator should receive appropriate notice in line with award (or Enterprise Agreement) provisions.

Note that the 'additional face-to-face hours' in the Inclusion Support Portal have been increased **only** to allow services to continue claiming Inclusion Development Funds while attendances are not being recorded in the Child Care Subsidy System. The approved non-face-to-face hours for each case remain as advised on the approval letter.



Can you please advise if our service is forced to close will our inclusion support funding continue to be paid the same as our CCS payments?

Services receive payment for the IDF Subsidy for Immediate/Time-Limited Support and Additional Educator by submitting claims for the number of hours the Additional Educator was employed, up to the maximum weekly approved hours on the approval letter, and the number of hours the child (or children) included in the approval attended, except where non-face-to-face hours are claimed. If services are not operating, the educator funded by the IDF Subsidy for Immediate/Time-Limited support or Additional Educator should receive appropriate notice in line with award (or Enterprise Agreement) provisions. In such instances, IDF Subsidy will not be able to be claimed until the service re-opens.