

## Cheaper kindy for FNQ families

More than 1280 Cairns children a year are set to benefit from reduced price or free kindy, thanks to a more than \$1 billion investment announced by the Palaszczuk Government today. Member for Cairns Michael Healy said the kindergarten program funding overhaul was the most significant reform for the sector in more than a decade.

Over five years, the package includes:

- Free kindy access for 14,000 children a year
- Reduced fees for a further 26,000 children a year
- \$33 million to expand Kindy Uplift from 400 to 930 services
- \$38.5 million to help remote and regional services attract and retain early childhood teachers
- \$95 million in support for families with children who have a disability

“We know that the first few years of child’s life here in Cairns are incredibly important and play a major role in their future,” Mr Healy said. “The Palaszczuk Government knows that kindy counts. “That’s why we are increasing our annual investment in kindy from \$130 million to \$211 million per year, which means more than a billion dollars will go into our kindy services over the next 5 years, with ongoing funding after that.

“Here in Cairns, that means 1285 of kids will get reduced price kindy, with 531 of those getting it completely free.”

Member for Barron River Craig Crawford said kindy participation had grown rapidly in the state. “I’m proud that Queensland has seen kindergarten participation grow from 29% in 2008 to 96% today,” Mr Crawford said. “The Palaszczuk Government wants kindy in Queensland to not only be world class, but accessible and affordable too. “This is a significant change for the sector, and we’ll be working closely with providers in the coming months on things like software upgrades, contracts, and consultation with families to ensure they’re ready for the new program in 2023.” Speaker for Queensland Parliament and Member for Mulgrave Curtis Pitt said the package also includes an expansion of the Kindy Uplift program, and extra funding for children with disabilities. “We’re thrilled that this increased funding means we can more than double the number of services covered by the successful Kindy Uplift program to 930,” Mr Pitt said.

**In the Cassowary Coast region, 286 of kids will get reduced price kindy, with 104 of those getting it completely free;** at Mareeba, 218 kids reduced price and 111 free; in Douglas Shire 115 reduced price and 28 free, and in the Cook Shire 46 reduced price and 40 free.

Member for Cook Cynthia Lui said Kindy Uplift funding means services can invest in personalised programs so children can reach their full potential. “For example, funding could be used to provide a dedicated support worker or professional development for staff,” Ms Lui said. “We will also invest more than \$19 million per year to enhance support for families with children who have a disability or are developmentally vulnerable, so they can participate in either community or long day care kindies. “In addition, eligible remote and regional community kindergartens and kindergartens in long day care will receive a funding boost to use on things like accommodation assistance and relocation costs to ensure they can attract and retain a qualified early childhood teacher.”

Education Minister Grace Grace said the Palaszczuk Government was proud to be investing in Queenslanders’ early years. “I am proud that this Palaszczuk Labor Government is delivering not only an increase in funding, but funding that is clearly targeted to assist those who need it the most,” Ms Grace said. “We’re investing in our youngest Queenslanders, we’re investing in our families, and we’re investing in the Far North’s future.” The new kindy funding reform package is in response to the 2019 ‘Optimising outcomes for children: A review of early childhood education funding and arrangements in Queensland’. Total annual investment in kindy from 2023-2024 will be \$307 million. This includes the investment from the Australian Government. There are 29 services in the electorates of Cairns, Cook, Barron River and Mulgrave that are currently part of the Kindy Uplift program. An additional 29 services will be invited to join the program, as part of this announcement. For more information visit: [www.qld.gov.au/KindyFunding](http://www.qld.gov.au/KindyFunding)