

Early Education and Care Survey Sector Brief

August 2025



No one understands the challenges and opportunities facing Victoria in the 21st century better than local councils. From rapidly evolving technology to social changes, shifting economies to environmental pressures, our local communities and the governments that represent them—are at the forefront of multiple transformations happening simultaneously.

As the peak body for the Victorian local government sector, the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) offers councils a one-stop shop of services and support to help them serve their communities.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we live. We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

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Executive Summary

Victorian councils have a long-standing stewardship role in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) system, ensuring access, planning, and investment to support local children and families. In this context, the MAV 2024 ECEC Survey Summary Report provides critical insight into council perspectives as the State Government continues to implement the Best Start, Best Life (BSBL) reforms.

The 2024 survey builds on MAV's 2022 infrastructure survey and offers a more comprehensive overview, covering infrastructure, workforce, and change management. With an 89% response rate across councils, the findings highlight shared challenges and opportunities as councils adapt to reform demands, particularly in the lead-up to expanded Pre-prep hours and the rollout of the Priority of Access cohort from 2026.

Key findings include:

- **Infrastructure:** Councils own between 45% and 57% of all kindergarten buildings in Victoria. Ageing infrastructure is a significant concern, with 65% of respondents identifying it as an issue. Respondents also raised concerns about misaligned funding formulas and co-contribution arrangements, and the need for clarity and consistency regarding Kindergartens on School Sites (KOSS).
- **Workforce:** Councils are facing acute challenges in attracting and retaining qualified staff, with 81% reporting a lack of qualified professionals. Barriers include insufficient preparation through Certificate III and Diploma courses, varied industrial agreements across the sector, and concerns about wage pressures and service affordability.
- **Change Management:** Councils are navigating the most significant reform to ECEC in a generation. Respondents noted a need for clearer policy guidance, tangible implementation tools, and sector-wide case study sharing. Modelling for Priority of Access implementation is underway but varies significantly depending on whether councils are direct service providers.

MAV Recommendations:

1. Strengthen partnerships between local and state government, including through the MAV/Department of Education Partnership Agreement and regular ministerial engagement.
2. Secure long-term, sustainable funding for key reform components—particularly infrastructure, workforce development, and change management.
3. Commit to ongoing resourcing and regular updates to Kindergarten Infrastructure and Service Plans (KISPs) across the life of the BSBL reforms.
4. Continue MAV-led sector surveys as a mechanism for ongoing monitoring and advocacy.

The 2024 ECEC survey results will inform future MAV strategic planning and advocacy, reinforcing the essential role of local government in delivering equitable, high-quality early years services. MAV acknowledges and thanks all councils for their valuable contributions to this important work.

Introduction

Councils are stewards of their local early childhood education and care systems, with a long history of planning, ensuring access to, and investing in their children, families, and early childhood education and care (ECEC).

As the sector evolves and councils review their strategies and priorities, emerging from the reforms, MAV recognises the importance of building a robust statewide evidence base. This foundation will empower councils to shape their early years approach in a way that is tailored to the unique needs of their communities. To support this, MAV has taken the lead in developing sector-wide surveys for local government, ensuring a data-driven, responsive framework for decision making.

This survey follows a 2022 MAV infrastructure survey that helped shape an advocacy position to the Department of Education (DE) regarding resourcing to councils to support elements of the reform. Between June and September 2024, MAV undertook a second and expanded survey of all 79 councils to help build an evidence base as the reform progresses.

The second survey included workforce planning, change management, and infrastructure. With a strong 89% response rate, the results highlight what members saw as key opportunities and challenges.

Background

The MAV 2024 ECEC Survey Summary Report is a key resource for Victorian councils as they support the implementation of the State Government Best Start Best Life Reforms (BSBL) (<https://www.vic.gov.au/best-start-best-life-reforms>).

The BSBL reform is in its next implementation stage, with expanded hours for four-year-old children (Pre-prep) having begun in six local government areas this year, and from 2026, all eligible children from a priority cohort will be provided with additional hours of kindergarten.

Councils are continuing to consider and plan for the support they provide for these reforms, and this brief provides insights into the necessary change management being undertaken and required. The brief focuses on the areas in the survey of focus infrastructure, workforce, operational challenges, and opportunities as evidenced by councils. The survey results have already been valuable in informing other MAV strategic reports.

Given the rich vein of information that the 2022 and 2024 surveys have provided. MAV will commit to undertaking these surveys periodically to inform future advocacy.

We would like to thank councils for their generosity and time in completing the ECEC Services survey.

Summary of findings

Infrastructure

In Victoria, council-owned buildings form a substantial part of the infrastructure supporting kindergarten programs. These facilities often accommodate both kindergarten and long day care services, with local councils owning between 45% and 57% of all kindergarten buildings across the state. Ageing infrastructure was the single biggest issue councils identified in response to the survey.

Summary of opportunities included:

- Over 35% of survey respondents raised the issue of timelines regarding the need for quick assurance and alignment with Council budgeting periods. This would assist overall planning, as well as improve clarity and certainty of asset ownership and consistency regarding fit-out costs associated with Kindergartens on School Sites (KOSS).

Summary of challenges included:

- Co-contribution percentages have eroded over time. Funding formulas need to be revisited, focusing on ageing infrastructure – 65% stated this is already an issue across the State.
- Council's ability to fit Early Years projects within its wider capital works program, including the cost of maintaining assets. This is further supported by the Victorian Local Government Grants Commission Annual Survey and responses to survey question 29, whereby 38% of respondents identified maintenance as a challenge.

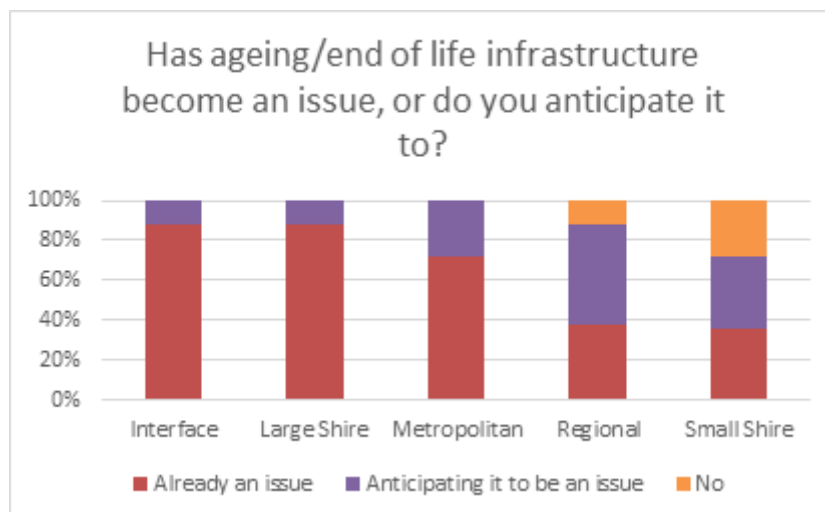


Figure 1 – Perception of ageing/end-of-life infrastructure challenge broken down by council comparator groups.

Workforce

Workforce capacity, recruitment, and retention continue to feature as key considerations in supporting the state's BSBL Kindergarten reform. An additional 11,000 early childhood professionals will be needed over the life of the reforms to 2036.

Summary of opportunities included:

- Councils potentially undertaking an economic development model to support early years teams to develop and implement their workforce plans.
- Developing a stronger workforce plan to ascertain and plan for the costs of attraction, recruitment, training, and retention. Early Years Management (EYM) organisations receive funding to undertake this activity.

Summary of challenges included:

- Lack of availability of qualified staff.
- Certificate Three and Diploma courses are not preparing educators and teachers as well as needed to ensure the quality-of-service delivery is of a high standard.
- Varying industrial arrangements and awards across the sector, coupled with different employment agreements, impact the opportunities for employers to engage part-time staff flexibly, and in effect, are a barrier to workplace shortage solutions.
- Wage increases, the cost of services, and the flow of financial impacts may have on families.

Workforce challenges faced by respondents			
	Availability of qualified staff	Retention	Wage pressures
Interface	78%	67%	67%
Large shire	75%	69%	56%
Metropolitan	86%	57%	67%
Regional	100%	63%	75%
Small shire	75%	69%	38%
Total	81%	64%	59%

Table 2: Workforce challenges faced by respondents, broken down by council comparator groups.

Change Management

The BSBL reforms are the most momentous change to the ECEC sector in a generation. The need for a considered focus on change management leadership, skills, planning, and process has become increasingly prevalent as councils commence increasing or planning for the increase to hours of 3- and 4-year-old Kindergarten, alongside policy updates like changes for the Pre-prep Priority of Access cohort in 2026 and 2028 supporting vulnerable children to have priority access to a kindergarten place.

Summary of opportunities included:

- DE policy to be translated into more tangible examples.
- Case Studies to be shared across the sector.
- Communication using toolkits and templates.

Summary of challenges included:

- Policy is not currently specific enough to implement, so councils are waiting on additional information from the Department of Education.
- Keeping the privacy of children if only one child is eligible under the priority of access policy.
- Parents may not get their preferred choice of service.

Respondents that have commenced modelling for priority children		
Pre-prep roll-out year	Not a direct service provider	Direct service provider
2025	0.0%	33.3%
2026	33.3%	20.0%
2027	14.3%	50.0%
2028	0.0%	71.4%
2032	NA	50.0%
2034	13.3%	35.7%

Figure 3: Whether respondents have commenced modelling for priority children, broken down by the BSBL rollout phase, and whether they directly provide a service.

Conclusions/Findings

MAV Key recommendations from the report

Responses from this survey reinforce the need for ongoing dialogue, communication with, and advocacy to the Victorian Government. As the peak body for local government, key areas of action for the MAV are:

1. Strengthening the partnership between the State and local government through initiatives such as the MAV/DE Partnership Agreement and regular meetings with the Minister for Children. Acknowledging that effective reform relies on the crucial role of local government in early childhood education and care (ECEC services).
2. Ensuring sustainable, long-term funding to support the various components of the BSBL reform, such as infrastructure, workforce initiatives, and change management.
3. Securing the commitment of the Victorian Government to provide ongoing funding for the updating and review of Kindergarten Infrastructure and Service Plans (KISPs) for the life of the BSBL reforms.

Next steps for the MAV are to provide the Department of Education with a high-level summary and insight paper. Sharing the Summary Report internally to contribute to future MAV strategic work relating to cost transfer and infrastructure planning.

Recommendations

Key considerations are:

- The partnership with the local government continues to be recognised by the State Government through a range of mechanisms and engagements such as the MAV/DE Partnership Agreement, MAV representation on the BSBL Taskforce Advisory Group, and ongoing meetings with the MAV CEO and Minister for Children.
- The State Government acknowledges that its reform can only be achieved through the value and role local government brings to the delivery of ECEC planning, infrastructure, and services.
- That the State Government commits to the regular ongoing resourcing and review of Kindergarten Infrastructure and Service Plans (KISPs) for the duration of the implementation of the BSBL reforms, noting that ninety percent of councils have agreed to a KISP in 2024.
- That adequate, sustainable, and longer-term funding and resourcing is made available to councils to assist their efforts in supporting the BSBL reform.
- That there is value in MAV undertaking further surveys across the life of the BSBL as a pulse check and to inform any future position and advocacy in support of our members.
- Department of Education Survey Key Highlights Summary developed and distributed.

Survey respondents' summary.

Summary of survey respondents	
Council type	Number of respondents
Metropolitan	21
Interface	9
Regional city	8
Large Shire	16
Small Shire	16

Further information

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