



Welcome

While most of Australia is enjoying a relaxed summer break, we need to spare a thought for the many thousands of people affected by the devastating floods in Queensland, Northern New South Wales and other parts of the country. Some important measures are in place to assist child care services and families at this difficult time and these are summarised below. While this information is primarily for flood-affected services, I've included it in the Newsletter for all of you because the same provisions can be used in other emergency situations such as bushfires, cyclone damage or earthquakes. Hopefully you will never need to know about the local emergency provisions, but if you do, it will be easier to deal with if you know what to expect.

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Local Emergency provisions

The Australian Government is supporting communities affected by the floods in many ways, like sending Army helicopters to evacuate people and providing payments through Centrelink to people who are forced to leave their homes.

Several emergency measures in the child care area are available to help support services and families affected by the floods. The measures fall into five categories, summarised below.

Absences for CCB purposes

You may report absences for days when the service is closed due to the emergency. If you remain open, you may report absences for children who are unable to attend care. In both situations, the system will treat the absences as Additional Absences, regardless of the child's absence history and they will not reduce the number of initial absences available in the future.

Special CCB

The flood situation is regarded as a hardship event that enables you to consider SCCB (for temporary financial hardship) for families needing extra help with their fees. SCCB covers the full cost of care. The usual guidelines still apply, so check Chapter 14 of the Child Care Service Handbook for more details.

Business Continuity Payments

If your service is unable to submit reports to the CCMS for more than a fortnight, due to disruptions caused by the floods, you may request a Business Continuity Payment. This is not an extra payment, but an advance of CCB funds, based on recent payment history. The advance is recovered from future payments once you are able to resume normal reporting to the CCMS.

Debt recovery arrangements

If you are repaying a COS Overadvance debt by instalments, we can suspend the repayments during the emergency. You will need to call the Helpdesk to request a suspension if you are in financial hardship because of the floods.

Other funding programs

DEEWR provides funding to eligible child care operators under the Community Support Program and Inclusion and Professional Support Program and provides Budget Based Funding to Indigenous and non-Indigenous services. In each case, services receive payments quarterly and have to return regular utilisation and service reports. These reporting requirements will be relaxed for flood-affected services.

Frequently Asked Questions

Absences:

Should I report absences as "Additional Absences"?
No. Report the absences as ordinary absences. The system will recognise them as additional absences because of the Local Emergency flag and will not update the absence count for those children.

Does the same apply for children who haven't used their 42 initial absences?

Yes. The previous absence history doesn't count.

Can I report absences and get CCB without having to charge a fee to the family while the service is closed?

No, CCB is not paid unless a fee is charged. How you charge for periods when you are closed because of the flooding is your business decision. The fee you charge and report the CCMS can be equal to a family's CCB entitlement.

My service is closed anyway at this time of year; can I now report absences under the Local Emergency provisions?

No, because the children were not booked to attend care for the period of the scheduled closure and it is likely that you haven't charged fees for this period either.

Can I report absences for children who were due to start care, but couldn't start on time because of the floods?

Yes, but if the child doesn't start at your service at all, you will have to cancel the absences.

Special Child Care Benefit (SCCB):

Can I approve SCCB for absences during the period of emergency?

Yes, but you still need to apply the usual guidelines, get an application from the families concerned and document your decision. You can't make a blanket approval of SCCB for all the children; you must consider each family on a case by case basis.

What if the family is unable to supply documents about their financial situation for the SCCB claim?

The minimum requirement is a statutory declaration from the family, giving details of their financial situation. Clearly, some families may not initially be able to sign forms. In an emergency situation, you can make a determination about SCCB without first completing all the necessary paperwork. You still need to document your decision and it is important to follow up with the family when you are able to do so and get them to sign the forms at that time.

Can I approve SCCB for a child at risk?

SCCB for a child at risk may also be appropriate during this period. You need to apply the guidelines in the handbook.

Records:

Our records have been destroyed by the floods – what should we do?

Call the CCMS Helpdesk to advise us of the situation. You will need to tell us about the type of records lost and the period of time they relate to.

Tell us if you are closing

If you are able to, please contact the Helpdesk to let us know that you are closing during the emergency. This will help us to keep track of the impact of the emergency on child care services and to let others know the situation. You can call us on **1300 667 276** or send an email to CCMShelpdesk@deewr.gov.au.

Do you have new admin staff?

Many services have new administration staff starting work at this time of year. We are planning to issue an updated version of the CCMS Reference Manual mid-year, but in the meantime there are other resources available to help new staff learn about the CCMS.

The most important resource is the **2010-2011 Child Care Service Handbook**, so make sure new staff are familiar with the handbook and how to use the online versions.

The desktop **CCMS Quick Guide** can be used to reinforce the information in the Handbook and answer questions that crop up while processing enrolments and attendance reports.

Old editions of the **CCMS Newsletter** cover lots of topics that are still relevant and worth keeping for future reference. Make sure new staff look out for new editions of the Newsletter during the year.

The DEEWR and Mychild **Websites** contain Frequently Asked Questions, Instruction Sheets and Fact Sheets on a wide range of topics.

