

# Universal childcare subsidy from September <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

The Government has agreed that a new universal childcare subsidy for children under the age of three will be payable from next September.

Minister for Children Katherine Zappone said the measure will benefit up to 33,000 children, giving families of those in full-time, registered childcare an annual boost of €1,000.

The measure applies to children aged from six months to 36 months, or when they begin the free pre-school programme.

It is one of a number of measures which will be paid for by the additional €19m in funding agreed for the area in last October's Budget.

In a statement, Ms Zappone said Cabinet has approved the move as part of a range of financial measures that will see more than 70,000 families benefit from reduced childcare costs from September.

She said children aged from six months through to 15 years will benefit with the highest levels of supports aimed at families with the lowest incomes.

The minister also announced what she called "significant increases of up to 50% in childcare subvention rates provided under the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCSS) for children aged from 6 months up to 15 years old".

A public information campaign on the package is to be launched next month.

Ms Zappone and Minister for Social Protection Leo Varadkar say it will be targeted at low-income families and those with children under three years old.

It will also target more than 3,000 childcare providers throughout the country.

Ms Varadkar described the initiative as "a major step forward".

The national organisation representing childcare providers has warned that the Government's initiative to make their services more affordable is likely to increase the industry's recruitment and financial crises.

Early Childcare Ireland (ECI) also says it is disappointing that 9,000 families will miss out on a €12-a-week subsidy in the short term because of issues related to law reform and information technology.

In a statement welcoming the broader initiative, ECI warns that delivering more affordable childcare from this September may put providers under even greater pressure at a time when many are struggling to survive.

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