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Our Future


Two childcare centres could rise 753m from one another on city's edge



By [Georgina Sebar](#), and [Tom O'Callaghan](#)

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 An artist's impression of a childcare centre Wel.Co has planned for Huntly. Image supplied

A small corner of Bendigo could soon have four [childcare](#) operators a race to corner the rapidly growing market.

But with existing shortages and space for another 2000-odd homes by 2056, it appears unlikely existing [childcare](#) spaces will cope with mounting demand.

Ten per cent of Huntly's population was aged four or under in 2021, nearly double the average for Greater Bendigo, council-statistics suggest.

And the suburb's total population is expected to triple to 14,000 residents by 2046.

Here's a map showing current childcare groups in Huntly and Epsom (in blue) and some of the proposed ones (in purple), along with neighbouring suburb Epsom:

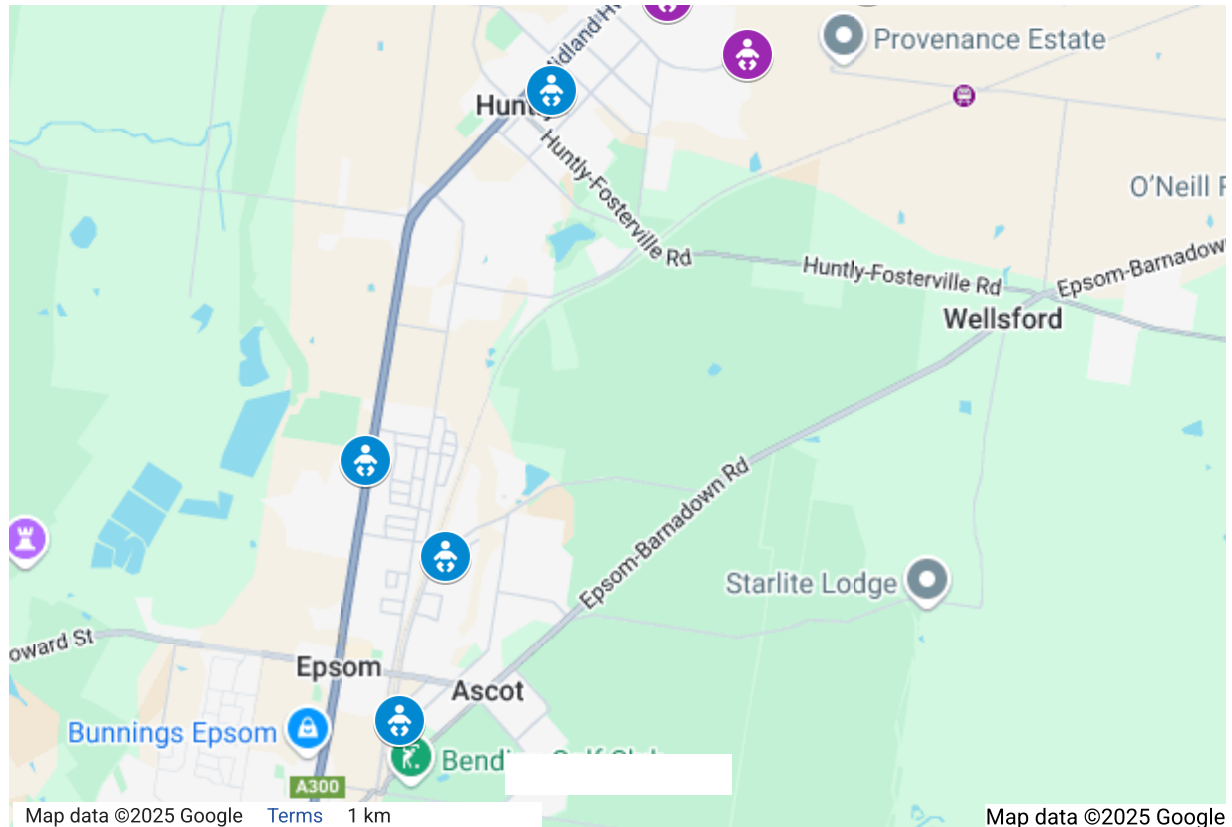
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Childcare in Huntly ☆

Georgina Sebar

This map was made with Google My Maps. Create your own.



Some pressure to lift

At least some of the childcare pressure could be eased this year, with two new childcare centres expected to open within 800 metres of each other.









Developer Wel.Co has revealed designs for a "state-of-the-art" childcare centre on Sawmill Road, Huntly, which would link in with the Harlowe housing estate.

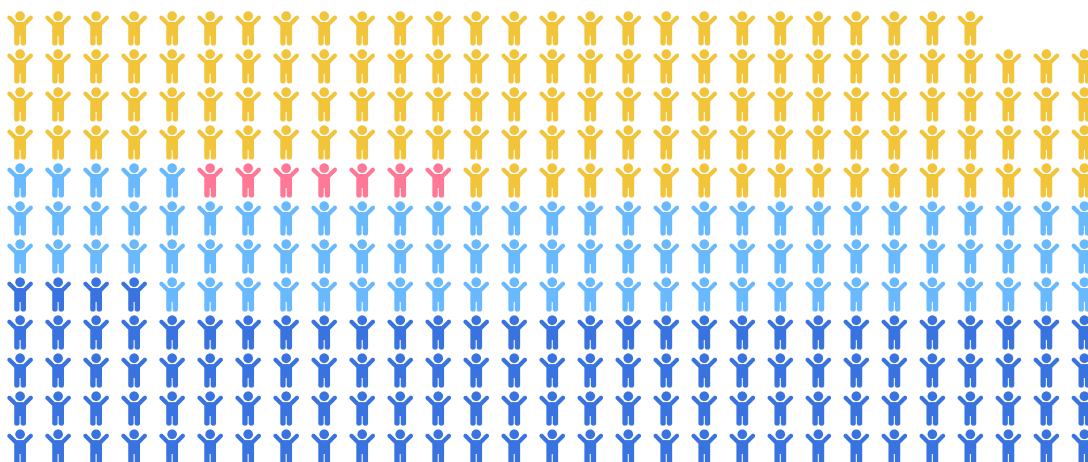
"We understand the challenges faced by families in regional areas, and we are committed to providing a solution that not only meets but exceeds their expectations," Wel.Co managing director Andrew Welsh said.



How many children can get care?

We approached the following childcare, early learning and kindergarten centres in Huntly and Epsom to find out how many children they could cater to:

-  Wil.Co proposed development
 -  Aspire Huntly Village Childcare centre
 -  Shine Bright Huntly Kindergarten
 -  Annabella's little explorers
 -  Shine Bright Epsom Kindertgarten
 -  Journey Early Learning Epsom
 -  Jenny's Early Learning Centre - Epsom
-  = 1



We are still to confirm offerings for Jenny's Early Learning Centre and Shine Bright.

A few blocks away on Waratah Road, childcare provider Aspire was poised to open its own childhood centre and kindergarten.

Smallest providers eyeing possibilities

And it is not just larger outfits setting up near Waratah Road.

Huntly resident Annabella Hodges is starting her own childcare service in Delawarr Parade, where she is offering four spaces for under-fours, and three for older children.

"I built my house at 20 years old, so I have a bit more leeway to start my business in Huntly," she said.



📷 The soon-to-open Aspire childcare centre and kindergarten. Picture by Tom O'Callaghan

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How many centres is too many?

Real estate agent Sacha Dale had been selling properties at the View Point housing estate – close to Aspire and Wel.Co's properties – for a decade and said the rapidly growing suburb's childcare shortages were very real.

"There is demand from young families," the PRD agent said.

He knew of existing Huntly residents struggling to get into existing centres.

Still, not all the childcare centres earmarked for Huntly could be guaranteed a successful future.

Mr Dale knew of other developers who had recently considered building childcare centres or had been in talks with potential childcare operators.

He said it could come down to what was happening in the broader property market.

The number of first-homebuyers building across Bendigo had slowed in recent years, with other investors more likely to pick up the slack, Mr Dale said.

Many were older or building to rent, which could impact the number of children needing daycare in Huntly's housing estates, he said.

Could there be workforce shortages?

La Trobe University's Director of Learning and Teaching, Dr Elise Hunkin, said expanding childcare places and attracting a quality workforce to staff them were the same goal.

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"They go hand-in-hand, one can't happen without the other," she said.

Dr Hunkin said the workforce shortage made staffing difficult across the country, but it was often more difficult in the regions simply due to the population size.

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Anecdotally, however, she said graduates of La Trobe's early childhood education programs were often able to secure graduate work because of the workforce shortage.

"We find that many of our pre-service educators work part-time in early childhood and education support roles while they study, so sector employment often starts well before graduation."

Aspire confirmed it had no concerns about workforce shortages at its new Huntly premises.

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"We are very mindful of the broader workforce challenges in early education, and we take great pride in being able to attract and retain some of the best and most passionate educators in the industry," head of strategy Simone Andrews said.

She said part of the pitch to potential workers at sites like Huntly – along with Kennington and White Hills – was to highlight career pathways through the company.

Wel.Co was contacted for its take. Its 120-space childcare centre in the Harlowe estate was expected to open later in 2025.

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