



Mental Health Carer Support Fund Guidelines 2009

Caring for a relative or friend with a serious mental illness presents carers with many challenges. Families and other carers are important contributors to the care of a person with a mental illness. Addressing the support needs of carers is an important part of clinical service delivery and provides longer term benefits to both the consumer and the carer.

The **Mental Health Carer Support Fund** can make it easier for carers to continue their caring role through access to discretionary funds that meet some of the direct and indirect costs related to the caring role.

The fund is made available by the Department of Human Services and is administered by the Victorian Mental Health Carers Network. The centralisation of the administration of fund is aimed at providing consistency in the application of the guidelines, promotion of the fund to carers and has the capacity to optimise the turn around times for payments.

As a result of the changes introduced on 1 July 2009, these guidelines replace the previous Mental Health Carer Support Program – Brokerage Fund Guidelines dated June 2003.

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on the use of the **Mental Health Carer Support Fund** to those assisting carers.

What does the Mental Health Carer Support Fund do?

The **Mental Health Carer Support Fund** assists families and other carers by providing support and assistance when required. The aim of the program is to meet the needs of the carer by providing funding for a distinct purpose and, in doing so, to promote and sustain the caring relationship and the well being of the carer.

The fund **cannot** be used:

- to fund a service or activity already funded by the Department of Human Services;
- for ongoing employment of staff;
- to benefit consumers only; their carer should gain the most benefit;¹
- for items or activities arising from or resulting in breaches of the law.

Funds will **not** be provided for services that would usually be the responsibility of the public mental health service. Hence, short-term counselling for the family, beyond that usually provided by the public mental health system may be supported.

¹ The funds are to meet the needs of the person in the caring role directly however there may be exceptions where the assistance goes to the consumer but the carer actually derives the greatest benefit. It should be noted that people with a mental illness may apply for material aid through the Psychiatric Illness and Intellectual Disabilities Donations Trust Fund (PIIDDTF)

Some examples of how funds may be used include:

- Travel – Transport costs associated with visiting the person with a mental illness in hospital or accompanying them to medical appointments;
- Support Services – practical assistance for the carer through services such as home help or child care;
- Educational, employment and recreational expenses – opportunities for the carer to pursue other activities through educational, employment or recreational activities;
- Carer education programs and conferences to enhance an understanding of mental illness and the mental health system, enhance carer coping capacity and knowledge of self-care.
- Counselling – for carers and family members to deal with the emotional and relationship impacts of caring;
- Respite - opportunities for the carer to have a break from the caring role;
- Expenses – reimbursement of costs incurred by the carer on behalf of the person for whom they care when they are unwell.
- Activities for a group of carers - the fund may be used to support an activity for a group of carers such as attendance at a sporting event.
- Sitting fees for carers who participate in activities on behalf of the area mental health service such as membership of Carer and Family Advisory Groups.

Who is eligible for the Mental Health Carer Support Fund?

The carer of a person who is receiving services from a public mental health service or program in Victoria.

In the case of families, assistance through the fund may be provided to other family members if the carer gains the most benefit.

Note: Paid carers are not eligible to apply for this assistance. Examples include disability support workers, professional mental health workers, and staff from supported residential services and rooming houses.

Considerations for Assessing Requests

As funds available to the mental health services are limited, the following are considerations that may assist in assessing requests.

- Do the goods and/or services assist the carer in relation to their caring role?
- Does the assistance meet an immediate need or avert a potential crisis?
- Are the goods and/or services of reasonable standard and cost?
- Has the availability of other sources of funds been considered?

It is not a requirement that the carer assist with any financial contribution. However where requests are not fully funded, the partial funding should substantially support the carer's needs.

What is the role of the area mental health service?

To support access by carers, the mental health services are encouraged to:

- Distribute information about the **Mental Health Carer Support Fund** provided by the Carers Network to all staff and carers using a number of formats and avenues including Carer Consultants where applicable.

- Support carers to be engaged in the application process
- Establish a local appeals process where two approvers excluding the original approver will review the application. The service decision will be the final appeal decision.

What is the role of the Victorian Mental Health Carers Network?

The role of the Victorian Mental Health Carers Network is to promote a consistent approach to information about the guidelines and the application process as well as to develop a responsive and timely process for remittance.

It aims to reduce the burden of the administrative and accounts payable function of mental health services by:

- receiving approved applications from area mental health services for remittance
- ensuring applications are complete and meet the guidelines
- ensuring the availability of a support administrator to respond to queries and requests for information about the fund
- executing payments within agreed timelines
- creating and distributing reports to mental health services and the Department of Human Services regarding expenditure.

Applications and payment

Manual applications can be made by fax or email. Online applications can be made through the **Mental Health Carers Support Fund** link on the Victorian Mental Health Carers Network website at www.carersnetwork.org.au.

On receipt of completed applications that meet the guidelines for payment, remittance will be made as soon as possible and within a maximum of 10 working days.

Other support for carers

On request, mental health services can be provided with a range of options for immediate support to carers and they can include taxi and petrol vouchers, movie tickets and store gift cards.

Further information

Further information about the **Mental Health Carer Support Fund** is available from the Victorian Mental Health Carers Network:

Email: carersupportfund@carersnetwork.org.au
Tel: 03 8803 5555
Fax: 03 8803 5599

www.carersnetwork.org.au