

Youth Outreach

Flexible Funding

Guidelines for expenditure

October 2024

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of Health

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Purpose of the youth outreach flexible funding

Youth outreach flexible funding (flexible funding) supports the delivery of personalised and holistic responses to young people with alcohol and other drug concerns by assisting them to access support, move out of crisis, stabilise, and improve their well-being and quality of life.

Flexible funding is provided to youth alcohol and drug outreach services in recognition of the particular barriers faced by young people in accessing human services, and in responding to co-occurring service concerns which need to be managed in a client-centred, coordinated manner. Addressing these co-occurring needs and additional barriers are necessary to support the young person to address their substance use.

The funding pools are therefore provided to enable youth alcohol and drug outreach services to purchase 'bridging services' and a flexible, client-tailored range of goods on a case by case basis. The purchase of these goods or services is intended to assist the young person to address their substance use and support them to achieve their best health and wellbeing so that they can live a life they value. This will be achieved through:

- Reducing immediate risks to the young person,
- Strengthening protective factors, and
- Enhancing the young person's quality of life

In acknowledgement of the diverse experiences of young people with substance use concerns, youth outreach workers have flexibility to determine the appropriate allocation of flexible funding, and the goods and services to be purchased. These should be determined based on the different, intersecting risks and needs of the individual client.

Key service requirements and features

Service providers are required to identify and document the eligibility, suitability, and priority for the use of flexible funding pools for client outcomes on a case-by-case basis. The use of the flexible funding pool should be part of a case plan that reflects the young person's goals and expected outcomes, and clearly articulates how the flexible support package will assist in achieving these outcomes.

The use of the flexible funding should be regularly reviewed to ensure it remains a suitable avenue of access to goods and services that cannot be accessed through other means.

Key service requirements for the flexible funding pools are that the funds are used:

- in alignment with a documented case plan
- to purchase items or services to enhance the young person's ability to reduce harm arising from their substance use
- to provide an immediate response so that crisis situations are (where possible) prevented or otherwise resolved immediately

Decision-making processes around the use of the funds must be transparent and documented, including:

- the amount of funding allocated
- the allocation criteria used by the service provider
- the prioritisation process used by the service provider
- how the expenditure reflects the Alcohol and Other Drug program guidelines.

Key service requirements and features

Below is a non-exhaustive list of funding categories and purposes that may be considered appropriate use of the flexible funding.

Accommodation

To reduce the immediate risk to the young person, such as homelessness or family violence, and to retain young people who face additional barriers within the youth and alcohol and drug service systems by ensuring the provision of timely access to appropriate support services. This could include:

- crisis accommodation for a young person while awaiting entry into a residential program
- payment of rental arrears, to reduce the risk of the young person being evicted from their home

Health and medical costs

The payment of once-off medical costs that are not covered by the Medicare Benefit Scheme, or other Commonwealth, State, or Local government funding sources, the payment of which will be of benefit to the young person in managing drug dependence or improving health and wellbeing and encourage further engagement with the alcohol and other drug service. This could include:

- dental work
- allied health services to help relieve withdrawal symptoms or support recovery. For example, work with a dietitian to improve nutrition planning
- once-off medication not covered by the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme (PBS) or covered by the PBS that incurs an administration fee such as the provision of pharmacotherapy, contraception or similar

Material aid

Immediate material supports to prevent risks to the young person and support ongoing engagement with the service system. This could include:

- the purchase of groceries, meals, toiletries, and personal hygiene products

- the purchase of necessary clothing. Examples of this could include seasonal-specific clothing (winter jackets, scarves; summer lighter shirts), culturally appropriate clothing (including modest clothing, or religious head-coverings such as a hijab or dastar as required by the young person), and/or uniforms or work clothes that will support on-going engagement with education, employment, or training
- provision of IT connection supports, including a security protected mobile phone and pre-paid sim card
- support for regular local travel that supports engagement, for example a myki card, or taxi vouchers
- support for specific longer travel, such as intra-State long distance travel for alcohol and other drug treatment services not available within the region, and to return home after discharge from the service

Educational, vocational, recreational, sports, and cultural opportunities

To strengthen the protective factors supporting a young person to manage substance use, including through continued engagement with education, employment, or training to improve the young persons' prospects, and build self-esteem. To improve community and cultural connections as a protective factor, including communities and cultures connected to recreational activities, such as sports. This could include:

- contribution towards the costs of books, stationery, or fees for educational, cultural and/or vocational classes the young person wishes to attend
- the membership or participation fee for sports and recreational programs the young person identifies as being of interest but is unable to afford, or for relevant necessary equipment (such as participation fees for a sport or drama competition, or the rental or purchase of sports equipment, musical instruments, art/craft supplies)
- contributions to costs associated with attending community social events, such as youth LGBTIQ social events that will support the self-esteem and engagement of the young person
- contributions towards costs of driving lessons
- fees for vocational guidance

Support and supervision of clients

To facilitate access to those services that would otherwise be unable to support young people with additional needs. This might include:

- a client in a rural or regional area that needs additional support or supervision from a worker in the initial days after being discharged from a residential withdrawal service in Melbourne or in a regional centre; if there are no available services to support the young person closer to their residence or in their local area, funds could be used for a support worker to accompany the young person after discharge

Exclusions and additional requirements

The flexible funding pool cannot be used for the following purposes:

- illegal activity
- luxury items e.g. iPod or high-end sound equipment
- gambling
- products or services not identified in the case or support plan
- to replace or duplicate supports that are available through other funding sources, including other Local, State and Commonwealth Government programs
- the establishment and maintenance of new programs (e.g., the establishment of new youth outreach services in a different catchment areas)
- staff salaries or operating costs of the agency

Policies and procedures for funding expenditure

Each service provider is expected to have in place operating protocols for the allocation of funding pools. These protocols should be made available to the Department of Health (the department) and/or clients on request.

These operating protocols should include written policies and procedures developed to guide decision-making by Youth Outreach staff. They should enable staff to determine in a timely and appropriate manner the eligibility, suitability, and priority of the use of flexible funds to provide for the immediate needs of the young person, while ensuring that service provider's accountability requirements are met for the expenditure.

Policies and procedures should articulate the service provider's understanding of:

- the aims and objectives of the funding
- the target group for items/services purchased
- an understanding of intersectionality, and the importance these considerations when making funding decisions. This includes a recognition of the additional barriers faced by some young people, including Aboriginal young people, young people with a disability, from diverse cultural, linguistic and faith communities, gender diverse young people, young people who identify as LGBTIQ, young people who are victim/survivors of family violence
- situations in which funding expenditure is appropriate
- situations in which funding expenditure is not appropriate
- the procedures for accessing and expending the funding
- the procedures for recording and accounting funding expenditure

Flexible funds are to be used within the cost centre/catchment area they are allocated to. Service providers providing services across multiple areas are to negotiate the use of funds outside the allocated cost centre/catchment area with their local department contact.

Accountability

The service provider is responsible for ensuring that:

- the flexible funding pool contributes to agreed outcomes of the recipient
- the funds are spent in accordance with the support plan
- the funds are acquitted on an annual basis and acquittal submitted to their local department contact using the 'Youth Outreach Flexible Funding Expenditure Acquittal' template.
- data on client outcomes is collected
- service providers participate in program evaluation

Acquittal/Accrual

Service providers are expected to fully expend flexible funding over the relevant financial year. The treatment of any unspent funds will be negotiated with the department, depending on the amount and reasons. The department reserves the right to require service providers to repay the unspent funds to the department.

Service providers are also required to monitor and acquit expenditure against individual support or case plans, follow up irregularities and review plans. A key purpose of such funding acquittal is to ascertain that funds provided have been fully expended or committed in accordance with the agreed funding plan. The department may undertake a forensic audit of the program management documentation to ensure funds are acquitted as agreed in individual support plans.