

Guidelines for the use of Brokerage Funds in Specialist Homelessness Service

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1 Introduction

These guidelines are provided to inform the use of brokerage funds by Specialist Homelessness Services. This document outlines the purpose, scope, principles, and operational procedures for the use of those funds.

2 Background

The Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy provides brokerage funds as a component of grant funding for some organisations under the Homelessness Program. Brokerage funds are provided to organisations supporting people who are experiencing homelessness and those at risk of homelessness, with the aim of assisting people to move into independent accommodation or assisting them to maintain their existing accommodation.

The provision of brokerage funds for Specialist Homelessness Services is based on the premise that the targeted use of funds can assist people to access or maintain independent accommodation by addressing the issues that put them at risk of homelessness or prevent them from accessing accommodation.

In some cases, the purchase of food, white goods or the payment of rent, rental bonds, or electricity may be sufficient to meet a client's immediate needs. In other cases, the purchase of specialist support may assist clients to increase their capacity to address issues that put them at risk of homelessness.

3 Purpose of Funding

The purpose of brokerage funding in the Homelessness Program is to:

- assist clients to access or maintain independent accommodation
- assist clients to address any problems or issues that prevent them accessing or maintaining accommodation
- provide responses that are flexible and tailored to client needs.

4 Scope

These guidelines relate to brokerage funding provided to Specialist Homelessness Services under the Homelessness Program.

5 Definitions

5.1 Brokerage

There is no specific definition of brokerage under the National Classification of Community Services. In the context of the Homelessness Program, brokerage is defined as the purchase of a good/service that will support client(s) meeting their goals as specified in a case/support plan.

5.2 Case Management

Brokerage funds are used within a case management context to enable clients to access a range of goods and services they may need to access or maintain accommodation, including addressing issues that make them homeless or put them at risk of homelessness. This is particularly important for clients with multiple needs as it improves access to specialist support and services.

Case Management in the context of Specialist Homelessness Services is defined as:

A two-pronged approach incorporating direct client service, based on sound assessment and support planning, and coordination of access to and delivery of, a range of other appropriate support services.

Case management in Specialist Homelessness Services may involve one worker as a key worker for a particular client, or a team approach. The focus is on a strengthened service response for each individual service user, to ensure that a high-quality service is received and client choice and responsibility is enhanced.

Case management in Specialist Homelessness Services is flexible in application and timing in recognition of the many needs of individuals, and the limited control any one agency or worker has over client outcomes.

Case management in Specialist Homelessness Services occurs in the context of a time limited framework for intervention.

Based on Leslie Gevers Community Management Service (1997) Case Management Resource Kit for SAAP Services, Department of Family and Community Services

5.3 Specialist Support

The provision of specialised services that are essential to the implementation of a person's case plan. For example, purchasing counselling sessions to address issues that are preventing a person from addressing other goals in a case plan.

6 Principles

The use of brokerage funds in the area of homelessness is guided by five principles:

6.1 Flexibility

The use of brokerage is driven by choice and flexibility in services and can be applied at any point across the service delivery continuum.

6.2 Client Focus

Brokerage support is responsive to and driven by the expressed need of the client, and is respectful of the rights, dignity and confidentiality of the client.

6.3 Case Management

Brokerage funds are administered in the context of case management and provide for the purchase of services and resources considered essential to achieve client outcomes ensuring that:

- interventions purchased with brokerage funds are assessed and negotiated in collaboration with the client
- responses are tailored to the needs of clients
- some level of assessment and planning is put in place prior to, or concurrent with, the use of brokerage funds
- brokerage is not the first or only service provided to the clients.

6.4 Avoid Duplications of Service Provision

Brokerage funds are used to purchase goods or services only when direct service delivery, case coordination, or referrals cannot supply the goods or services.

Brokerage funds are not intended to duplicate the provision of one-off financial and material assistance.

Brokerage funds can be used to purchase specialist support services through sub-contracting arrangements when the required service is not provided by the funded organisation and other options have been exhausted.

6.5 Value for Money

Interventions purchased with brokerage funds are to be as cost effective as possible. When deciding to commit brokerage funds, consideration is given as to whether the intended expenditure is the best use of resources to meet identified client outcomes.

7 Eligibility and Priority

Brokerage funds are provided to clients who are homelessness or at risk of homelessness and whose needs have been assessed in the context of case management.

Brokerage funds are a tool that can be used to achieve client outcomes, therefore priority should be given to clients for whom the use of brokerage funds is critical to achieve identified outcomes.

Brokerage can be used by services to assist homeless clients or clients at risk of homelessness to:

- access new accommodation or maintain existing accommodation arrangements
- access specialist support, where it is not possible to arrange timely access to an existing free service
- meet a client's immediate needs where no other options are immediately available.

Brokerage funds, in the context of case management, may be used to:

- pay utility bills
- pay bond
- pay rent arrears
- purchase bedding for a person in temporary accommodation
- purchase of material aid such as food, white goods or medication
- purchase specialist services that are not offered by the agency or available from a free service including:
 - counselling
 - family mediation and support
 - mental health and psychiatric services
 - occasional childcare
- cover travel costs for clients to access support or affordable housing
- cover removal expenses to access affordable housing.

8 Limits on Brokerage Expenditure

Brokerage is not to be the first or only service provided to the clients.

Brokerage funds, in the context of case management, may not be used to purchase temporary structures, including:

- tents
- swags
- other items similar to a tent or swag.

In circumstance where a Specialist Homelessness Service identifies a temporary structure is considered part of addressing a client's immediate needs, the Specialist Homelessness Service is required to escalate the client's needs to the relevant Regional Director, Service Delivery, Housing and Homelessness Services, Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy who can assist with alternative solutions.

Brokerage funds are only to be provided in the context of case management. Case plans must demonstrate the use of brokerage as part of a range of strategies to resolve a client's housing and support issues.

Prior to using brokerage funds to purchase a good or a service, alternative sources, that may be less expensive or free, should be explored. If an appropriate service is available and able to meet their needs, then clients should be referred to that service.

Funded services are expected to quarantine brokerage funds from Administration and Organisational Costs and cover the cost of administering brokerage funds within the general administrative costs of the service.

9 Accountability

Funded services are required to:

- ensure that brokerage funds provided by the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy under the Homelessness Program are used in accordance with these guidelines
- provide timely and accurate reports about the use of brokerage funds, in the format specified as part of the Homelessness Program performance reporting

- develop a policy and procedures for managing demand for brokerage funding, including clear eligibility requirements and assessment processes based on the principles outlined in these guidelines
- provide a repayment scheme to clients who choose to repay brokerage funds as part of their case plan
- ensure that any repayments of brokerage funds are returned to the brokerage pool and used in accordance with these guidelines.