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| Recognising the expertise of people with lived experience |
| Guidance on payment, reimbursement and recognition |
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Contents

[Introduction 1](#_Toc180750670)

[Considerations for payment, reimbursement and recognition 4](#_Toc180750671)

[Tiered approach to payment 9](#_Toc180750672)

[Engaging people with lived experience 10](#_Toc180750673)

[How to pay people with lived experience 12](#_Toc180750674)

[Encouraging people to seek independent financial advice 14](#_Toc180750675)

# Introduction

## Background and purpose

Seeking, listening to and acting on the voices of people with lived experience is critical to creating policies, programs and services that are safe, effective, connected, and person-centred for everybody, every time.

People with lived experience of the community services system hold unique perspectives and insights into the experience of receiving services and programs. These insights are vital to helping decision makers understand complex issues from the perspective of service users.

People with lived experience can share their expertise (also referred to as ‘the client voice’) through a range of activities such as:

* consultation or co-design on policies, programs and services
* interviews, workshops or focus groups
* contribution to and review of documents
* membership of working groups, advisory councils and committees
* facilitation of education and training
* service delivery.

Contributions can be made in a variety of ways. For example, they may be verbal and non-verbal, including in the form or drawings or actions.

Everyone who is asked to provide their expertise should be recognised for their time and skills.

The purpose of this document is to give guidance on ways to pay, reimburse and recognise people with lived experience for their time and expertise.

## Audience

This document is for staff working in the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (the department). It provides guidance on payment, reimbursement and recognition of people with lived experience of the community services system (people with lived experience).

Other government departments and people with lived experience may find the guidance useful. The guidance is also available to the community services sector; however, many community service organisations have local procedures that are suitable for their settings.

## Scope

This document has guidance for discussions and decisions **specifically** about the payment, recognition and reimbursement of people with lived experience for their engagement with the department.

It is aligned with and builds on the *Appointment and remuneration guidelines* (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2022). See [Victorian Government website’s Board appointment, remuneration and diversity guidance](https://www.vic.gov.au/guidelines-appointment-remuneration) [[1]](#footnote-2)

The guidance in this document is not prescriptive. You should be flexible and adopt approaches that work in the context of the engagement. Wherever possible, this should be informed by discussions with the person with lived experience.

Not every type of engagement appears in this document. The activities described are examples only. They serve as a guide for similar activities.

Read this document in conjunction with:

* *Client voice framework for community services* (2019). See the [Client voice framework for community services](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/client-voice-framework-community-services)[[2]](#footnote-3).
* [Young voices](https://www.vic.gov.au/young-voices)[[3]](#footnote-4). It offers guidance, information and tools to support safe and meaningful child and youth participation.

The Client voice framework provides overarching principles and good practice guidance to support all other aspects of engaging people with lived experience in ways that are safe, ethical and meaningful. The Client voice framework also covers the types of support necessary to ensure people with lived experience are informed and empowered to make choices about:

* their roles
* their identity
* when and how they share their knowledge and expertise.

For children and young people, there are specific additional considerations that need to be in place to ensure engagement is safe, ethical and meaningful, for example around:

* consent
* communication
* boundaries and support.

Refer to the guidance on [Young voices](https://www.vic.gov.au/young-voices)3.

## Glossary

| Term | Definition |
| --- | --- |
| **Client voice** | See 'Lived experience’. |
| **Department or DFFH** | The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. |
| **Engagement** | The various ways a person with lived experience may work with the department. For example, consultation, surveys, co-design or appointment to committees. |
| **Learning and development** | Opportunities for a person with lived experience to take part in activities that they decide will develop their knowledge or skills. For example, training in presenting or chairing. |
| **Lived experience** | The knowledge, expertise, insights, experiences and outcomes of people, families and carers with previous or current involvement with the community services system.  This system includes services provided by:   * the department, such as child protection * community services organisations.   Lived/living experience is a person’s unique knowledge and intersections of personal attributes such as race, gender, and disability. It includes verbal and non-verbal indicators of a person’s experience or views. It may include clear or subtle actions and behaviours. It can include non-engagement in services. Some people undertake specific training or qualifications to enhance their skills as lived/living experience consultants.  Note, this guidance uses the term ‘lived experience’ to encompass both previous (‘lived’) and current (‘living’) experience. |
| **Payment (or remuneration)** | The payment a person with lived experience receives for their time and contributions as part of their engagement. For example, paying an hourly fee for a lived experience consultant. |
| **Recognition** | Acknowledgement of the valuable contribution made by a person with lived experience during their engagement. For example, providing a thank you letter or a letter of recommendation to a potential employer. |
| **Reimbursement** | Compensating a person with lived experience for expenses they incurred as part of their engagement. For example, covering the cost of travel to an event. |

# Considerations for payment, reimbursement and recognition

Payment, reimbursement and recognition are not mutually exclusive. In some situations, it is appropriate to use all of them. The option to pay people with lived experience for the valuable, specialised and expert contributions they make should be considered first.

The Client voice frameworkprovides the overarching principles and good practice guidance to help you seek, listen to and act on the client voice in ways that are safe, ethical and meaningful. See the [Client voice framework for community services](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/client-voice-framework-community-services)2.

The following guiding considerations are **specific** to payment, reimbursement and recognition. Read these in conjunction with the good practice guidance in the Client voice framework.

* People with lived experience should benefit from sharing their expertise. Payment, reimbursement and recognition are some of the benefits of engaging. However, there are other benefits, as outlined in the Client voice framework.
* Support people with lived experience to feel empowered and informed in discussions and decisions around what is reasonable payment and reimbursement **before** the engagement. Discussions about payment and reimbursement can be tricky to start and take part in. A power imbalance makes it even harder for people to self-advocate.
* Ensure people are not pressured to take part in any exchange that may disadvantage or harm them (refer to the Client voice framework for good practice guidance).
* Give people clear information in accessible formats (such as plain language and Easy English documents) as soon as possible that explains what people are being asked to do and what the resource limitations are. This enables people to make an informed decision about whether to take part.
* Staff should be supported to understand and implement the department’s guidance on payment, reimbursement and recognition.
* Share information about the department’s payment, reimbursement and recognition practices with people with lived experience so that everyone understands what is considered usual practice.
* Recruitment should be based on a position description that clearly describes:
  + the purpose of the engagement activity and what is required of the person with lived experience
  + the length of their engagement and the approach to payment, reimbursement and recognition
  + accountabilities of the person with lived experience, the department and staff for the engagement
  + possible learning and development opportunities
  + how people can nominate what supports they need to enable them to participate (for example, being accompanied by an inclusion support worker).
* For some people, the payment they are given for their engagement may affect their government benefits (Centrelink) or tax. Advise people to seek independent tax advice on any impacts extra income may have. You can direct them to the Australian Tax Office’s (ATO) Tax Help program. See **Encouraging people to seek independent financial advice** for more information.

## Payment

People with lived experience can expect to be paid for their work when they are engaged by the department, for example for consultation, co-design or appointment on a committee. However, it is also important to consider the basis of the engagement.

For a time-limited and small-scale engagement (like a short online survey that lets people opt in or out), it might be appropriate to offer a non-monetary benefit, including a formal thank you (see **Recognition**).

In other cases, you may need:

* regular engagement or formal representation on a working group or committee, and
* a high level of input from the person with lived experience.

In such cases, payment for time and expertise is likely to be the most appropriate option.

To test whether monetary payment is appropriate, consider whether other stakeholders would be paid for the same sort of activity or input. For example, a consultant or service provider representative if it is outside their employment duties. Look at existing or commensurate examples and what approach has been adopted.

Members of the public are often not paid for their involvement when they are invited to:

* contribute their views through a survey or submission
* participate as an audience member in a webinar or other funded learning or development opportunity.

However, you should consider the barriers to taking part that can exist for people experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage and other forms of inequality or discrimination, as well as the emotional labour of participation for people with a lived experience. A form of payment may:

* address some of the barriers
* enable a more diverse range of people to provide input
* ensure a wide range of views and experiences are represented.

In all cases, an open and respectful discussion about payment and recognition with the person involved should take place (taking steps to account for any power imbalance) and an outcome should be agreed.

Payment will vary based on the activity. When determining the payment amount, consider the following (**not** in order of importance):

* nature of the work (including the sensitivity of the subject and the emotional labour needed)
* workload and time commitment
* degree of accountability, complexity and responsibility
* the person’s skills and experience.

Part of your project plan should include:

* identifying the source of funds to pay people with lived experience
* determining the process for how to pay people.

Sources of funding should also be identified for:

* Support services, such as mental health and wellbeing for people with lived experience (using the department’s health, safety and wellbeing programs where possible). This could be supports or briefings and debriefings on a current engagement activity. For longer-term engagements, it could be career or other counselling.
* Paying an inclusion support person or interpreter to attend (or reimbursing their costs to attend) if requested by the person with lived experience.

**Example 1: Advisory group meeting**

* **Approach:** Payment.
* **Amount:** fee of $240 for four hours (includes meeting and preparation time).

Liza has just become a standing member of an advisory group for a government department.

They were offered this role after completing an expression of interest where they outlined several qualifications including:

* lived experience of the service system
* lived experience practice expertise
* professional experience as an independent consultant.

Liza is not paid by an organisation to be a member of the advisory group.

As an equal member of the advisory group, Liza is paid by the department for their time and expertise

**Example 2: Workshop**

* **Approach:** Payment.
* **Amount:** $75for 1.5 hours.

A program area was designing a change to a service model.

The program area engaged six people with lived experience to take part in a 1.5-hour workshop.

The participants were formally thanked in writing and offered $75 as payment for their time and expertise. The participants could choose to receive payment as gift cards or direct payment into their bank account.

## Reimbursement

Reimbursement of expenses associated with participation is different from payment, so both should be considered separately.

You should reimburse any reasonable out-of-pocket costs associated with attending meetings (such as travel, meals, childcare or car parking).

Where meetings are held virtually, costs associated with internet access would not be covered.

However, consider that, for some people, participation in a virtual meeting may mean traveling to somewhere other than home to access a:

* safe environment for participation
* suitable device
* stable internet connection.

In such cases, these costs should be reimbursed as reasonable out-of-pocket costs and considered as part of project budgets.

Reasonable travel costs should be reimbursed when a person with lived experience needs to travel for their engagement with government (for example, to a venue). General principles include that:

* travel should seek to ensure efficiencies and minimise costs
* the default method of travel should be by the most economical and direct route
* when available and appropriate, public transport is the preferred method of travel – note that taxis may be necessary for accessibility
* when using their own car, government will reimburse for mileage costs and car parking
* accommodation may be provided for people with lived experience on a case-by-case basis. For example, a person living in a rural or remote area who must participate early in the day or where it is unsafe for them to drive long distances before or after their participation. The criteria for being reimbursed for accommodation should be outlined in the expression of interest or position description.

Expenses like public transport or car parking can stop some people from participating. Some people do not have the money to cover expenses upfront. For other people, waiting for an extended period of time to be reimbursed can impose a financial burden.

Consider ways to cover the costs of participation ahead of the event, such as providing train tickets or free car parking.

Make sure people understand how long it will take for their expenses to be reimbursed **before** they agree to participate.

**Example 3: Workshop**

* **Approach:** Reimbursement.
* **Amount:** $27.50(in addition to payment).

Ben has been invited to participate in a two-hour workshop in Melbourne to share his experiences of a service.

Ben lives in regional Victoria so attending the workshop will be at some out-of-pocket cost to him.

In addition to the payment Ben receives to attend the workshop, the organisation agrees to reimburse Ben’s train ticket. Lunch is also provided for all attendees.

## Recognition

All people with lived experience who are engaged by the department should be recognised for their participation and contribution.

At a minimum, this should include a letter of thanks. It may also include:

* a certificate of recognition (also stored by the department so that the person can get a copy at any time)
* a summary of the engagement activity and how the advice has influenced the project or outcomes
* acknowledgement in published works
* a reference for the person, if relevant.

It is good practice to ask people what their preference is for recognition.

Other ways to support people’s involvement include providing refreshments for in-person activities or delivering a meal of choice to someone participating virtually in a committee meeting.

Recognition is considered appropriate for people who are engaged by the department in their role as paid employees of:

* the department
* organisations such as community services organisations
* Aboriginal community controlled organisations.

However, there may be times when payment is more appropriate.

The following questions may help guide discussions between individuals, organisations and the department to find a suitable arrangement:

* Is the person with lived experience employed by another organisation in a non-lived experience role? Are they representing their role or their lived experience?
* Is the activity aligned with or considered part of the person’s role as a paid employee of an organisation?
* Is lived experience consultancy a form of revenue for the individual or organisation?

**Example 4: Online survey**

* **Approach**: Recognition.
* **Format**: Thank you letter.

A program area designed a short (15 minute) online survey about their web pages. Respondents could opt in or out of completing the survey and were told at the beginning how their responses would be used to improve the web pages.

At the end of the survey, respondents had the option to provide an email address. Those who did received a thank you email and the option to be added to the program’s mailing list for updates on the project.

## Learning and development

In addition to determining the approach to payment, reimbursement and recognition, consider any learning and development opportunities that you can offer. These opportunities may not only facilitate engagement but also support people with lived experience to develop their knowledge and skills.

It is important to let people nominate what their learning and development needs are. Examples include:

* mentoring and coaching
* skills development in areas such as facilitating, presenting or chairing
* career development, including access to education and training
* resume and interview preparation
* network building and the chance to establish ongoing relationships.

**Example 5: Learning and development**

**Approach:** Payment.

The Transitions from Care team pays the young members of their Youth Expert Advisory Group (YEAG) to attend a Better Futures community of practice as observers.

This supports the young people’s understanding of current practice and system challenges. This, in turn, enhances their ability to provide considered feedback at the YEAG.

# Tiered approach to payment

Across the community services system, people with lived experience are paid for their time and expertise. However, there is significant variation in pay rates both within and between organisations.

This guidance suggests pay ranges to help achieve consistency and equity in practice, while being flexible enough to cover the wide range of engagement activities that take place.

The pay ranges have been developed considering current practice across the department, Appointment and remuneration guidelines1 and applicable industry Awards such as:

* Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award (SCHADS)
* Aboriginal Health Award
* Children’s Services Award
* Health Services Award.

These pay ranges are a **general guide** and will depend on the person’s **level of experience and expertise**:

* general consultation activities: $35 to $60 per hour
* activities needing **specific skills and significant expertise**: $50 to $100 per hour.

A fair and reasonable payment amount should be determined before the start of any engagement activity. Sometimes this amount may be set by the department, for example, in general consultation activities where participants in a group are paid the same.

Other times, this may be set by the person. For example, when a person with specific skills and significant expertise is working in their capacity as a lived experience consultant.

# Engaging people with lived experience

To help your discussions and decisions, Table 1 has examples of possible approaches to payment, reimbursement and recognition for a range of engagement activities.

Table 1: Examples of engagement activities and possible approaches to payment, reimbursement and recognition

| Engagement activity | Payment, reimbursement or recognition? | Payment amount |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Contract or consultancy.**  Engagement may be fixed term, casual or in a consultancy capacity for a specific project or program of work.  A procurement process may be undertaken, with the contract outlining the roles and responsibilities of the contractor. | Payment should be:   * comparable with other contracted employees with similar levels of expertise * discussed with the person at the start * outlined in the contract.   You may also consider recognising work undertaken for a project or program of work with a formal letter, as well as reimbursing out-‑of-‑pocket costs. | Consultancy fees should be discussed with the person with lived experience or the organisation they are engaged through.  In the absence of these, look at payment levels set in appropriate enterprise or workplace agreements.[[4]](#footnote-5) |
| **Ministerial or departmental committee.**  Members are formally appointed to the committee for a fixed term, with roles and responsibilities outlined in terms of reference.  People with lived experience are appointed for their specific skills and significant expertise. | Payment for preparation and participation in meetings. An estimate of the time allowed for these activities should be agreed at the start of the engagement.  Reimbursement for reasonable out-of-pocket costs where meetings are attended in person.  Recognition of contribution, for example via a formal letter. | Commensurate with other members of the committee or as per set consultancy fees.  More guidance is in the Appointment and remuneration guidelines.1  Refer to the suggested payment rate for people with specific skills and significant expertise under **Tiered approach to payment**. |
| **Advisory or working groups.**  Members are invited to participate in a time-limited group for a specific project or program of work, with roles and responsibilities outlined in terms of reference.  People with lived experience may be appointed for specific or general expertise and experience. | Payment for preparation and participation in meetings. An estimate of the time allowed for these activities should be agreed at the start of the engagement.  Reimbursement for reasonable out-‑of-‑pocket costs where meetings are attended in person.  Recognition of contribution, for example with a formal letter. | Commensurate with other members of the committee or as per set consultancy fees.  Refer suggested payment rate for general consultation activities under **Tiered approach to payment**. |
| **Interviews, focus groups or workshops.**  People with lived experience are invited to participate in a one on‑one interview or small focus group or workshop of up to two hours in duration. | Payment for participation in the interview.  Reimbursement for reasonable out-‑of-‑pocket costs for an in-‑person meeting.  Recognition of contribution, such as a formal letter. | Refer to suggested payment rate for general consultation activities under **Tiered approach to payment**. |
| **Forum, webinar or public participation activity:**  Open invitation to attend a one-off activity. This does not refer to hosting or facilitating the session. | Recognition of participation, such as:   * providing refreshments during in person forums * collective acknowledgement of time and contribution * letter of thanks.   A summary of the outcomes of the forum or public participation activity should be made available to participants. | Not applicable. |
| **Anonymous activity.**  This may include an online discussion, survey or questionnaire, and social media commentary. | A summary of outcomes should be made available to participants. | Not applicable. |

## Record of participant attendance

You must keep a record of participation to support payment, reimbursement and recognition. This includes for virtual meetings or forums where processes should be established to record who has attended.

It is important that participants are informed of how this information will be retained and used.

Refer to the Client voice framework for other information on maintaining privacy and confidentiality.

# How to pay people with lived experience

Use Table 2 to help you determine the best payment methods to use for your engagement.

Table 2: Possible payment methods

| Payment method | Information |
| --- | --- |
| **Human resources and payroll** | Consider this when people with lived experience are engaged to:   * undertake sessional assignments on an ongoing basis * long-term roles on committees * on contracts that are longer than six (6) months.   This process involves people being added to the organisation’s payroll and human resources management systems. |
| **Finance – as a vendor** | A person with lived experience can be paid as a vendor.  A vendor will need a vendor number. This is issued on payment of a vendor’s first invoice and should be kept for future payments.  There are two ways to establish a person with lived experience as a vendor:   * with an Australian Business Number (ABN) * without an ABN (in which case they would provide a statement by supplier). See the [ATO’s Statement by a supplier not quoting an ABN](https://www.ato.gov.au/forms/statement-by-a-supplier-not-quoting-an-abn)[[5]](#footnote-6). |
| **Finance – gift cards** | People with lived experience can be paid with gift cards – but you should note the challenges some people report, such as:   * lack of agency and choice in how income can be spent * difficulties organising to use the gift cards.   Also consider and discuss with participants the suitability of certain gift cards. For example, young people living in a rural area may not be able to access a particular store (such as Coles). A voucher to a local business or two tickets to a local cinema may be more suitable.  Unless it is a person’s preference to be paid in this way, gift cards should be reserved for ad hoc payments in exceptional circumstances or as a payment of last resort.  When deciding to pay with gift cards, follow the department’s [gifts, benefits and hospitality policy](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/dffh-gifts-benefits-and-hospitality-policy)*[[6]](#footnote-7)*.  This ensures the payment does not raise an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest and is:   * provided for business reasons * in line with the value provided to the organisation * considered reasonable in terms of community expectations.   In line with the Gift card policy and the department’s responsibility for proper use of public funds, the department cannot issue gift cards that can be used to buy alcohol.  Each card cannot exceed $50, though multiple $50 cards can be given.  Suitable gift cards include:   * Woolworths grocery gift card. This card excludes alcohol. * Coles gift card that is not redeemable at Coles Online, Coles Express or Liquorland. Cannot be redeemed for cash, payments of credit or store accounts, or used to buy gift cards.   You can buy gift cards directly from a retailer or online using a corporate credit card. You will need approval from the appropriate financial delegate.  Support should be sought from Accounting Services about using gift cards. |
| **Funding an organisation** | People with lived experience may be engaged through an existing organisation (such as CREATE Foundation, Safe and Equal, WEAVERS or InTouch).  In this case, the organisation is paid by providing an invoice or through an existing service agreement with the department. |
| **Honorarium – volunteers** | An honorarium is either:   * an honorary reward for voluntary services (non-assessable income), in which case they would provide a statement by supplier – see the [ATO’s Statement by a supplier not quoting an ABN](https://www.ato.gov.au/forms/statement-by-a-supplier-not-quoting-an-abn)5. * a fee for professional services voluntarily performed (assessable income).   For more information see the [ATO ’s Paying volunteers](https://www.ato.gov.au/Non-profit/Types-of-Not-for-profit-workers/Not-for-profit-volunteers/Paying-volunteers/) [[7]](#footnote-8). |

# Encouraging people to seek independent financial advice

The payments people receive may affect their tax or government benefits. The effect will be different for each person, depending on their individual circumstances.

Some people with lived experience will be aware of the financial considerations they need to make; others may not be.

The department can only offer information of a general nature. Encourage people to seek advice specific to their circumstances from:

* the ATO
* Services Australia (Centrelink)
* a financial advisor.

The [ATO’s Tax Help program](https://www.ato.gov.au/Individuals/Your-tax-return/Help-and-support-to-lodge-your-tax-return/Tax-Help-program)[[8]](#footnote-9) is a free resource for anyone unable to afford help with their tax.

To receive this document in another format, email the Children and Families Division [ChildrenandFamiliesEngagement@dffh.vic.gov.au](mailto:ChildrenandFamiliesEngagement@dffh.vic.gov.au)

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1. https://www.vic.gov.au/guidelines-appointment-remuneration [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/client-voice-framework-community-services [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. https://www.vic.gov.au/young-voices [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. For example, paying people the same rate as youth facilitators under the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services (SCHADS) Industry Award 3.1. (Casual loading if applicable) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. https://www.ato.gov.au/forms/statement-by-a-supplier-not-quoting-an-abn [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/dffh-gifts-benefits-and-hospitality-policy [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. https://www.ato.gov.au/Non-profit/Types-of-Not-for-profit-workers/Not-for-profit-volunteers/Paying-volunteers [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. https://www.ato.gov.au/Individuals/Your-tax-return/Help-and-support-to-lodge-your-tax-return/Tax-Help-program [↑](#footnote-ref-9)