



Medication Program for Homeless People

November 2025

The Medication Program for Homeless People assists people who are homeless and are considered incapable of managing their own affairs, to continue accessing their Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) medication where omission of their medication could lead to undesirable medical or social consequences.

Background

The Medication Program for Homeless People, previously known as the Continuing Medication Program, was first established in 1990 in response to the introduction of a patient co-payment for pharmaceuticals on the PBS. Concerns were raised by welfare agencies about the adverse effects a patient co-payment would have on homeless people who are not able to afford appropriate medical treatment. A lack of health care for homeless people could potentially lead to significant long-term health and social costs for the community. The program enables eligible people who are homeless to access their essential PBS medicines (section 85 General Schedule medicines only) with no out-of-pocket costs.

On 1 July 2021, the name of the program was changed to the Medication Program for Homeless People, to better reflect the intent of the program. The program is legally underpinned by the [National Health \(Medication Program for Homeless People\) Special Arrangement 2021](#).

Funding

The Medication Program for Homeless People is funded by the Australian Government to provide eligible homeless people with PBS medicines with no out-of-pocket costs.

Eligibility requirements

The following eligibility requirements exist for organisations, community pharmacies and clients.

Organisation

To be approved to participate in the Medication Program for Homeless People, organisations need to complete an application form which will be assessed by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (the Department). Organisations must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- be not-for-profit;
- be providers of services/care to homeless people;

- not be receiving other funding for pharmaceutical or other healthcare services from the Australian Government;
- Organisations must assess each client's eligibility to participate in the program using the criteria outlined in the legislative instrument and the Program Guidelines; and
- ensure PBS medication is only supplied to their clients who meet the eligibility requirements of homelessness under the program.

Community Pharmacy

The approved organisation is responsible for having a working relationship with a community pharmacy/or pharmacies to participate in the program. The approved organisation will need to confirm eligibility and suitability of a pharmacy/pharmacies to participate in the program.

Pharmacies must have the capacity to:

- ensure PBS prescriptions are properly annotated with the organisation's approval number;
- maintain safety net records for eligible people; and
- provide service to the organisation in urgent situations.

Client

Eligible clients must hold a valid Medicare card and concession card.

To be an eligible client, the approved organisation must assess that the person:

- meets the below definition of Primary or Secondary Homelessness¹;

Primary homelessness

People without conventional accommodation, such as people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings, or using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter.

Secondary homelessness

People who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another. It covers: people using emergency accommodation (such as hostels for the homeless or night shelters); teenagers staying in youth refuges; women and children escaping domestic violence (staying in women's refuges). and

- is incapable of managing their own affairs to afford essential PBS medicines where lack of access to medication could lead to undesirable medical or social consequences.

Note: A person is not **homeless** if the person is a care recipient of residential care within the meaning of the *Aged Care Act 1997*.

¹ Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992). Understanding Contemporary Homelessness: Issues of Definition and Meaning. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*. 27(4):274-297

Participation in the Medication Program for Homeless People

Application Process for not-for-profit organisations

In order for the Department to assess whether a not-for-profit organisation is eligible to participate in the program, the organisation must complete an Application Form and provide the Department with the following information:

- a statement outlining the services provided by the organisation to homeless people, including any accommodation and medical services;
- a copy of the organisation's most recent annual report;
- any additional information the organisation considers may assist in determining the organisation's eligibility under the Program; and
- details of the community pharmacy/pharmacies the organisation nominates to dispense the eligible PBS medicines.

Roles and Responsibilities

Responsibility of the Approved Not-for-Profit Organisation

- The organisation will be responsible for assessing a client's eligibility for the program based on the criteria outlined in the legislative instrument and the Program Guidelines.
- The organisation will be required to annotate the eligible homeless person's PBS prescription with an approval number representing the not-for-profit organisation, e.g. CMP001. The Department will assign the approval number to the organisation.
- The organisation will be responsible for deciding at a local level, whether the eligible person takes their annotated PBS prescription directly to the nominated pharmacy themselves, OR whether a representative from the organisation will act as an 'agent' for the eligible person by taking their annotated PBS prescription to the nominated pharmacy and then providing the medicine to the eligible person.
- The organisation will keep records for all PBS prescriptions claimed through the program. For compliance, the Department requires the organisation to provide on a monthly basis, the number of PBS prescriptions that the organisation presented to the nominated community pharmacy / pharmacies for dispensing under the program, and the number of prescriptions that the organisation has authorised the nominated pharmacist to annotate on behalf of the organisation.
- The organisation must inform the Department of any changes to information provided in the Application for Participation in the Medication Program for Homeless People, including but not limited to change of address, additional sites and updates to the contact officer.

Role of the Department

- The Department assesses a not-for-profit organisation's eligibility to participate in the program.
- The Department will provide the organisation with the decision in writing.
- The Department will assign an approval number to organisations approved to participate in the program.

- The Department undertakes compliance activities for the program, which will include a monthly audit on the number of PBS prescriptions dispensed under the program reported by approved organisations and the data reported through PBS Online.

Where can I seek further information?

Any further queries can be emailed to cmpprogram@health.gov.au

Frequently Asked Questions

How long does it take for the Department to assess my application?

The Department's standard processing time for applications is 28 days. If the application is incomplete, or the Department requires further information/documentation to assess the application, this will be requested from the organisation.

The Department will notify applicants of the outcome of their application in writing. If approved to participate in the program, the Department will provide the organisation with an approval number which the organisation will use to annotate the PBS prescriptions of eligible people.

What happens if someone with a concessional card has a PBS prescription but does not have any money to pay for their medication?

The organisation is required to check if the person meets the definition of homelessness as outlined in the Legislative Instrument and the Program Guidelines. If the person does not meet any of the above definitions, then their PBS medication cannot be claimed under the program. It is a requirement of all organisations participating in the program that they continually check that their clients who are obtaining their PBS medications under the program remain eligible and meet the definitions of primary and secondary homelessness under the program.

Primary homelessness: People without conventional accommodation, such as people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings, or using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter.

Secondary homelessness: People who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another. It covers: people using emergency accommodation (such as hostels for the homeless or night shelters); teenagers staying in youth refuges; and women and children escaping domestic violence (staying in women's refuges).

What happens after my organisation has deemed a person as eligible for the program?

Once a client has been deemed eligible by the approved organisation, a staff member of the organisation will need to check that the medicines listed on the eligible client's prescription are claimable under the program. If the medicines are claimable, the staff member will then need to annotate the client's prescription with the organisation's approval number.

What medicine is covered under the program and where do we find out what medicines are on the PBS?

The Program applies to prescriptions for PBS General Schedule medicines only. These are PBS medicines made available under Section 85 of the National Health Act 1953 (the Act). Medicines available under S100 Programs are not eligible. The PBS is available at www.pbs.gov.au and the pharmacist your organisation uses will also be aware of which medications are claimable under the program and may be able to assist you.

How does the organisation annotate eligible prescriptions?

A staff member of the approved organisation can annotate the eligible prescription by hand by writing the approval number on the patient's prescription. Note: If prescriptions are not annotated correctly, the pharmacist will not be able to dispense the PBS prescription as a valid Medication Program for Homeless People prescription.

What if there is more than one medicine listed on the one prescription?

If there is more than one medicine listed on one prescription, the organisation will need to check that each medicine listed is eligible for the program. If so, they can annotate the prescription with their approval number. However, the organisation will need to ensure that their record-keeping reflects the number of medicines listed on the prescription.

What is the procedure for repeat prescriptions?

Repeat prescriptions should not be annotated by the organisation at the same time as the original prescription. As a client's homelessness status can frequently change, a patient must be assessed by the approved organisation **prior to** each PBS prescription being dispensed, including repeat prescriptions.

Who can take the eligible prescription to the pharmacy?

The organisation can decide at a local level, whether the eligible person takes their annotated PBS prescription directly to the nominated pharmacy themselves, **OR** whether a representative from the organisation will act as an 'agent' for the eligible person by taking their annotated PBS prescription to the nominated pharmacy and then providing the medicine to the eligible person.

How does the pharmacy claim the prescription?

Pharmacies will need to check prescriptions are correctly annotated with the approval number. If not, they may need to contact the approved organisation for confirmation.

The pharmacy must record the approval number annotated on the prescription in the pharmacy dispensing system prescription record. The approved pharmacy dispenses the client's medicine and the claim/PBS concessional co-payment is automatically processed through PBS Online.

If the annotation is valid, the cost of the PBS medicine supplied, including the PBS concessional co-payment relief amount, will be paid to the pharmacy.

What happens if a client wants a more expensive brand of a medication, rather than the generic brand?

Only the PBS concessional co-payment rate is subsidised under the program. The current concessional co-payment can be found at www.pbs.gov.au. It is indexed annually, and the new rate applies from 1 January each year. The following items are not funded under this Program:

- administrative fees;

- Where a client arrives at the Concessional Safety Net Threshold further items should be supplied free of charge for the remainder of the calendar year, ending the claim for assistance under the Program.
- Brand Price Premiums or Therapeutic Group Premiums included in the cost of the prescription. Under these arrangements the person pays the difference for higher priced brands or items. These are extra charges that are paid by the person in addition to the usual PBS co-payment.
- Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (RPBS) prescriptions, as the Department of Veteran Affairs is responsible for these compensatory benefits and hence RPBS prescriptions do not receive a subsidy under the Medication Program for Homeless People.
- other prescriptions not subsidised under the PBS, e.g. dressings, vitamins or private prescriptions.
- Closing the Gap (CTG) prescriptions as these are funded through a different program.

What happens if a client wants an item that is not on the PBS?

The Medication Program for Homeless People applies to PBS items listed in the General Schedule and Extemporaneously Prepared items on the PBS. The PBS can be found at www.pbs.gov.au. Non-PBS items such as vitamins, supplements, band aids etc, are not subsidised under the program. It is a decision for the organisation whether to purchase non-PBS items for clients, however these items are not funded through the program and therefore not paid by the Commonwealth.

Does the organisation need to provide data to the Department?

All approved organisations must keep records of the number of PBS prescriptions and medicines claimed through the program. The Department requires approved organisations to provide, on a monthly basis, the number of PBS prescriptions that the organisation presented to a community pharmacy for dispensing under the program, and the number of prescriptions that the organisation has authorised the nominated pharmacist to annotate on behalf of the organisation. There is a monthly reporting template provided to approved organisations.

Will our organisation be audited?

Approved organisations will need to ensure they maintain accurate records in relation to claims made under the program.

What if my organisation is approved to participate in the program, but then our circumstances change?

All approved organisations must advise the Department in writing of any change in circumstance that may affect the organisation's eligibility to participate in the program.