

# Policy and Guideline – Financial hardship assistance for drug and alcohol screening – ID17/66732

## Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure applications for financial hardship assistance from practitioners or students required to undertake drug and/or alcohol screening are assessed in a consistent manner, against the established guidelines.

## Scope

This operational policy is established in accordance with the *Ahpra Policy Framework*. It must be used and complied with by all relevant Regulatory Operations staff and decision makers.

## Relevant legislation

N/A

## Policy

Any practitioner or student required to undertake drug screening may apply in writing for financial hardship assistance which, if approved, will result in the relevant National Board bearing the costs of screening if the applicant complies with the relevant Ahpra protocol (Protocol).

The relevant Protocol will be the *Ahpra Drug and Alcohol Screening Protocol*, for restrictions in place prior to 16 September 2024, or the *Ahpra Protocol: Screen for drugs*, for restrictions in place from 16 September 2024.

Applications for financial hardship assistance for drug and alcohol screening must be managed in accordance with the Guideline below.

The delegate for making decisions under this policy is the National Director - Compliance. The delegate may cease financial assistance for issues of non-compliance with the Protocol or where the practitioner or student cannot provide ongoing evidence of the need for financial assistance.

## Financial hardship definition

For the purpose of this policy, financial hardship means that because of family tragedy, financial misfortune, unemployment, serious illness, impacts of a natural disaster and other serious or difficult circumstances a practitioner is unable to reasonably provide necessities such as food, accommodation, clothing, education and/or medical treatment for themselves, their family or other dependents, and by extension, the cost of ongoing drug and alcohol screening.

## Guideline

It is the responsibility of the compliance case officer to:

Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency  
National Boards  
GPO Box 9958 Melbourne VIC 3001 [Ahpra.gov.au](https://www.ahpra.gov.au) 1300 419 495

Ahpra and the National Boards regulate these registered health professions: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practice, Chinese medicine, chiropractic, dental, medical, medical radiation practice, midwifery, nursing, occupational therapy, optometry, osteopathy, paramedicine, pharmacy, physiotherapy, podiatry and psychology.

- a) assess applications for financial assistance for completeness immediately upon receipt and request any further information required from the registrant
  - KPI to assess applications is five business days from receipt
- b) assess complete applications and make recommendations to the delegate
  - KPI to decide an application is five business days
- c) implement the decision of the delegate
- d) report any non-compliance with drug screening to the delegate for review of the financial assistance being provided, and
- e) set a system reminder at five business days prior to the expiry date of an approval to consider whether ongoing assistance will be required and initiate a further application to ensure continuity

Use the *Template – Internal – Decide financial hardship assistance application* for submitting the recommendation to the delegate.

## Complete Applications

The applicant must submit a complete application as follows:

- A statutory declaration fully detailing:
  - monthly living costs including utilities, rent or mortgage payments, food and other expenses and any other debt payments
  - monthly income
  - the number and age of any dependents, and
  - any special circumstances impacting on the practitioner's ability to meet the costs of screening.

Use the *Form – Statement of financial position* for the practitioner to detail their income, expenses, liquidity and circumstances.

- Documentary evidence of monthly living costs, monthly income and of any special circumstances as outlined in the statutory declaration must be provided.
- Such documentary evidence could include but is not limited to the following:
  - Employment information or evidence of loss of employment
  - Letter from charitable organisation confirming loss of employment
  - Income details including bank account statements, pay slips or any proof of government (Centrelink) assistance
  - Debt statements such as bills, invoices or bank statements
  - Evidence of pending disconnection of essential services such as gas, water, electricity or landline
  - Bank notices such as overdraft call or mortgaged property repossession
  - Overdue medical bills
  - Birth certificate of dependents
  - Final notice from school re payment of mandatory fees
  - Funeral expenses
  - Repossession notice of essential items such as a car or motorcycle.
  - Letter from charitable organisation confirming inability to provide for basic necessities
  - An official eviction notice
  - Notice of impending legal action or evidence of legal costs
  - Letter from a non-board appointed independent doctor verifying the inability to earn an income due to illness or caring for a sick family member

Instructions for [Certifying Documents](#) is available on the Ahpra website.

Where documentary evidence is submitted that contains a name other than that of the practitioner making the application, evidence linking the identity of the practitioner to the item of evidence would be required (e.g. marriage certificate)

## Approved Applications

Practitioners or students approved by the delegate to receive financial assistance to undergo screening are to be provided with a 'Board Pays' screening request form for presentation to the approved collection centre.

New and current evidence of the ongoing need for financial assistance is to be sought by the compliance case officer each quarter to confirm the ongoing need for financial assistance. The evidence is to be in the same form as provided in the initial application. Where the evidence cannot be provided or does not support the need for ongoing assistance the matter is to be referred to the delegate for reconsideration of the financial assistance provided.

Any non-compliance, missed screening or positive results are to be reported by the compliance case officer to the delegate to enable reconsideration of the financial assistance provided.

## Reporting to National Boards

The National Director, Compliance will, at the end of each quarter, report to the relevant National Boards on costs incurred for financial assistance provided under this policy

## Related documents

[Ahpra protocol – Screen for drugs \(16 September 2024 to date\)](#)

[Ahpra drug and alcohol screening protocol \(November 2015 to 16 September 2024\) - PD18/454222](#)

[Correspondence – Practitioner – Application for financial hardship assistance – PD23/272044](#)

[Guideline – Monitoring restrictions relating to substance use – ID17/66665](#)

[Template – Form – Statement of financial position – PD16/429011](#)

[Template – Internal – Decide financial hardship assistance application – ID22/13899](#)

[Template – Internal – Financial position calculator – ID24/1443](#)

Document control	
Approval authority	Executive Director, Regulatory Operations
Policy Owner (administrative)	National Director – Cosmetic Surgery and Compliance
Responsible Officer	National Manager – Compliance, Program Management
Approval date	30 September 2015
Start date	30 September 2015
Next review due date	Yearly
Date of change	Details
July 2018	Updated