

# Regional Mental Health Workforce Incentives

Area Mental Health and Wellbeing Services (AMHWS) and  
Forensicare Guidelines

**OFFICIAL**

July 2024



Department  
of Health

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In this document, 'Aboriginal' refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. 'Indigenous' or 'Koori/Koorie' is retained when part of the title of a report, program or quotation.

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## Background

The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System (the Royal Commission) outlined a vision for the future mental health and wellbeing system. Since 2019, the Victorian Government has been working in partnership with clinical, community and alcohol and other drug (AOD) services, consumers, families, carers, and supporters to implement all the recommendations of the interim and final reports.

The Royal Commission placed the mental health and wellbeing workforce at the heart of system reform, highlighting workforce supply challenges across Victoria which are exacerbated in rural and regional areas. To address supply challenges in rural and regional Victoria, the Royal Commission recommended the establishment of an incentive scheme (recommendation 40).

The Department of Health (the department) launched the Regional Mental Health Workforce Incentives program (the program) in July 2022. This program is part of *Victoria's Mental Health and Wellbeing Workforce Strategy 2021-2024* (the Strategy) and is supported by investment from the 2021–22 Victorian State Budget.

The department funds the Rural Workforce Agency Victoria (RWAV) to administer the grants on its behalf.

## Purpose

The program has been introduced to address the workforce challenges to attract and retain mental health, AOD and lived and living experience workers in rural and regional Victoria. The program includes:

- workforce incentive grant
- integration support for workers and their families through access to funded community navigation roles assigned to specific regional catchments.

The program has two separate streams:

- Stream 1: Area Mental Health and Wellbeing Services (AMHWS) and Forensicare.
- Stream 2: Local Services, AOD and community-managed mental health services and including Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs).

**The purpose of these Guidelines is to clarify the details of Stream 1.** The Guidelines will be reviewed by the department in collaboration with RWAV as required.

## Scope – Workforce Incentive Grants

### Service eligibility

To be eligible, a relocating staff member must move to work in an Area Mental Health and Wellbeing Service or Forensic service in a regional or remote area as defined by the Modified Monash (MM) categories (i.e. MM2 – MM6 areas).

This includes the following Victorian specialist public mental health services:

- Albury Wodonga Health
- Barwon Health (roles based in MM2 – MM6 areas only)
- Bendigo Health
- Forensic (roles based in MM2 – MM6 areas only)
- Goulburn Valley Health
- Grampians Health
- Latrobe Regional Hospital
- Mildura Base Hospital
- South West Healthcare

### Worker eligibility

Eligible workers must:

- have appropriate working rights in Australia:
  - be an Australian or New Zealand citizen.
  - be an Australian permanent resident or have the necessary professional and migratory approvals to work in Australia.
- be relocating to a Victorian MM2 to MM6 area from interstate, overseas, or within Victoria (subject to the worker relocating to a higher MM area). Flexibility may be granted for extenuating family circumstances or critical workforce shortages.
  - For example, a candidate relocating from a Victorian MM2 to a Victorian MM4 area is eligible. A candidate relocating from a Victorian MM4 to a Victorian MM4 area would be ineligible.
- be employed in an eligible mental health role including (but not limited to) registered and enrolled nurses, social workers, occupational therapists, psychologists, lived and living experience workers, psychiatrists, medical professionals, mental health support workers etc. Please note, that workers employed to discipline specific and generic mental health roles including case managers are eligible.
- be employed to work for a minimum of 24 months with a minimum of 0.6FTE. Flexibility may be granted for lived and living experience workforce roles employed at a minimum of 0.4FTE.

Please note, that flexibility can only be granted by the department and additional conditions may be placed on grants.

## Workforce incentive grants

### Scale of incentive grant funding

Grants should not exceed \$20,000 (inc. GST) and are designed to support relocation, settlement, recruitment and training and development costs.

The table below provides some examples of expenses that may be claimed. Note, this list is not exhaustive and other expenses may be considered by agreement with the department.

### Eligible expenses for workers

Incentive grant funding may be utilised flexibly by workers towards eligible expenses included in the table below:

Relocation and travel costs	Settlement and integration costs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relocation expenses associated with the initial move e.g. removalist fees.</li> <li>Travel costs associated with costs of relocation only e.g. flights (noting that they must be economy and the most direct route).</li> <li>Initial rental costs e.g. bond and upfront rent.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School fees and childcare costs.</li> <li>Accommodation costs e.g. home buying deposits (noting that the grant may not be used towards a home deposit for workers relocating with a short-term contract).</li> </ul>
Professional development and training costs	Recruitment costs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>External discipline-specific supervision e.g. nursing, psychology or lived and living experience supervision (consumer perspective or family/carer perspective).</li> <li>Specialised training to build capability related to the role and aligned to reform e.g. the AOD skill set, clinical supervision training.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Services can access grant funding to pay for services from migration agents, recruitment agencies and marketing expenses to promote job vacancies.</li> </ul>

Incentive grant funding cannot cover expenses that are:

- (a) ordinarily paid by the employer;
- (b) towards sign-on bonuses;
- (c) towards financial penalties (e.g. cost to break rental agreements); and
- (d) expenses funded by other Commonwealth, State, Territory or Local Government initiatives.

## Workforce incentive grant conditions

1. Workforce incentive grants must be advertised with eligible job vacancies.
2. Workforce incentive grant amounts must be determined as per the criteria defined above.
3. 25 per cent of the workforce incentive grant must be held as a retention payment and can only be paid on completion of 24 months of service or contract end date (if an exception was granted for a contract less than 24 months).
4. Recipients of workforce incentive grants will be reimbursed for eligible costs paid for within 24 months of commencement. If funding is not expended within 24 months recipients will not be able to claim the funding.
  - Reimbursements will be processed after grant applications have been approved by RWAV.
  - Reimbursements will be processed after workers have commenced in their new role noting recipients can claim up to \$5,000 in relocation and travel costs before their commencement date (this applies to eligible international candidates also).

Original receipts and/or invoices must accompany all reimbursement claims.

5. Recipients and services must advise RWAV immediately of any changes to contact or employment details.
6. Recipients and services must participate in monitoring and evaluation activities.
7. By applying, services and recipients agree to these conditions.

## Processes

The following applies to services to access workforce incentive grants

To access workforce incentive grants, services will need to undertake the prescribed process (this process is described visually in **Figure 1** below):

1. The service nominates a key contact (their responsibilities are outlined below) who meets with RWAV to identify workforce needs, vacancies and how the service will utilise funding under the program. The key contact must read and keep up to date with the Program Guidelines.
2. Service advertises eligible mental health vacancies including information about workforce incentive grants. Services should include specific information about the workforce incentive grants and the support workers may receive from local community navigators.
3. Service sends eligible vacancies to RWAV via [mentalhealth@rwav.com.au](mailto:mentalhealth@rwav.com.au) to advertise on RWAV Mental Health Vacancies webpage.
4. Service identifies preferred candidate(s) and confirms candidate(s) eligibility to receive a workforce incentive grant with RWAV (including the amount of funding to be awarded). **This step must be completed prior to the service making an offer to the candidate.**
5. Service negotiates grant package with candidate(s) as part of the job offer discussion (in line with the conditions in this document).
6. Candidate accepts the role. Then, the candidate's manager or service's key contact submits a grant application form to RWAV including details of the items to be claimed through the program.
7. RWAV reviews the grant application and creates a grant contract for the service to sign and return to RWAV. Then, RWAV sends the grant contract to the candidate to be signed and returned to RWAV, and links them to the appropriate local community navigator.
8. On commencing employment, the candidate (i.e. grant recipient) claims the agreed expenses, attaching all relevant receipts and documents. Please note, that some expenses are eligible to be claimed before commencement to support relocation costs.
9. RWAV and the local community navigator will continue to support the grant recipient.
10. RWAV will formally conclude engagement with the grant recipient once they have received their final payment.

## Responsibilities of the service key contact and/or navigator

Services are required to nominate a key contact to support the implementation of the program. The responsibilities of the service key contact are to:

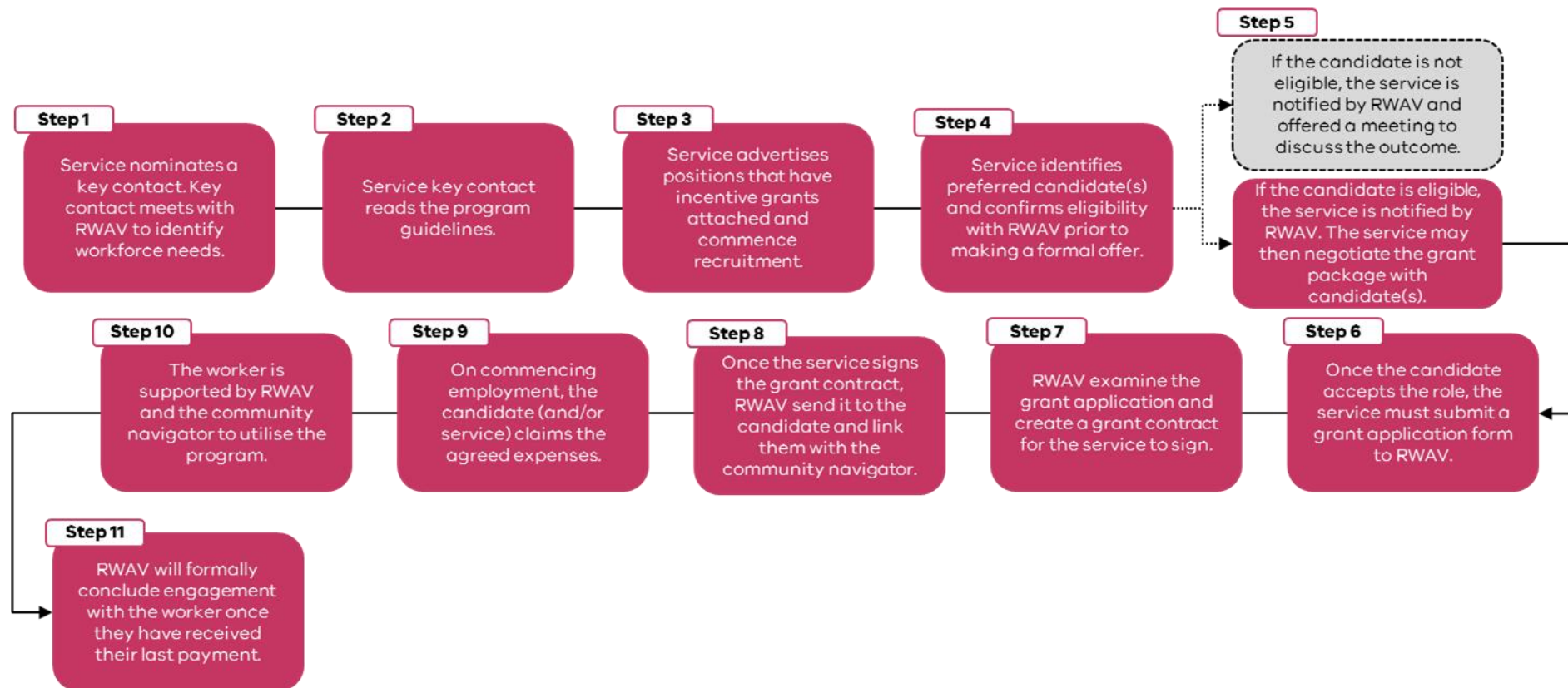
- engage with RWAV regularly to monitor service needs and vacancies.
- inform RWAV of relocation needs and how decisions have been reached to assign package(s) to vacancies.



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- keep an up-to-date record of all grant allocations and the grant balance held by RWAV.
- ensure that eligibility criteria and funding conditions are met.
- identify candidates' support needs and ensure that the candidates are linked to local community navigators.
- participate and promote data collection activities associated with the evaluation of the program. This may include direct participation in surveys and interviews and ensuring that other stakeholders and grant recipients are engaged in similar activities.
- promote and disseminate evaluation findings at their service.

**Figure 1.** Rural and regional workforce incentive AMHWS grants process



## Integration support for workers and their families

As part of the program, local community navigators have been funded to support integration and settlement. Local community navigators can be based in designated AMHWS, Council or other approved locations; however, their role is to support all candidates receiving a grant under the scheme.

Navigators will support recruits and their families by:

- Providing local information to individuals who are interested in moving to the region. This includes information about job opportunities, childcare, schools, and housing availability.
- Connecting individuals and their families to services needed for relocation to rural and regional areas. This includes removalists, car rental companies, accommodation agencies and schools.
- Coordinating initiatives to help workers create social and professional connections and integrate into local communities. This includes working with local councils, businesses, sporting clubs and primary health services to arrange various activities and programs for new workers.
- Working closely with services to understand and maintain up-to-date knowledge of their vacancies and priorities for recruitment.

Navigators are also responsible for developing tailored, placed-based supports across clinical and community services for their region. As such, the types of support may differ across rural and regional areas.

Please note that the navigators can be available to assist recruits who may not be eligible for grants under this program, for example, due to short-term contracts or relocating from ineligible MMM areas.

See the information in the table below to contact your local community navigator.

Service	How to contact the local community navigator
Albury Wodonga Health	Name: Vivian Email: <a href="mailto:Vivian.Ives@awh.org.au">Vivian.Ives@awh.org.au</a>
Barwon Health	Name: Fiona Email: <a href="mailto:Fiona.goonan@barwonhealth.org.au">Fiona.goonan@barwonhealth.org.au</a>
Bendigo Health	Name: Position is Vacant Email:
Goulburn Valley Health	Name: Jodi Email: <a href="mailto:mentalhealthcareers@gvhealth.org.au">mentalhealthcareers@gvhealth.org.au</a>
Grampians Health	Name: Joanne Email: <a href="mailto:workforcecommunitynavigator@gh.org.au">workforcecommunitynavigator@gh.org.au</a>

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Latrobe Regional Hospital	Name: Kate Email: <a href="mailto:kate.villani@lrh.com.au">kate.villani@lrh.com.au</a>
Mildura Base Hospital	Name: Monique Email: <a href="mailto:MSapuppo@mbph.org.au">MSapuppo@mbph.org.au</a>
Warrnambool City Council (for workers at South West Health)	Name: Rachel Email: <a href="mailto:REdwards@warrnambool.vic.gov.au">REdwards@warrnambool.vic.gov.au</a>

## Scope – Expanded Workforce Attraction and Retention Grants

**Please note this section applies to eligible Victorian specialist public mental health services only.**

### Service Eligibility

In addition to the workforce incentives grants described in the first part of these Guidelines, the 8 eligible Victorian Area Mental Health and Wellbeing Services and Forensic are now able to use their funding for attraction and retention grants to support their existing workforce.

### Worker eligibility

In this instance, eligible workers include the service's **existing** mental health workforce located in eligible MM2 to MM6 areas. They are not required to be relocating from interstate, overseas, or within Victoria.

Eligible workers must:

- be employed in a role based in a Victorian Department of Health funded service or program.
- be employed in a frontline service delivery or leadership role supervising frontline mental health and/or AOD workers.
- have been an existing employee for a minimum of 12 months with a minimum of 0.6FTE. Flexibility may be granted for lived and living experience workforce roles employed at a minimum of 0.4FTE.
- have not previously received a relocation incentive as part of this program.

Please note, that flexibility can only be granted by the department and additional conditions may be placed on grants.

### Scale of funding

Eligible services will work with the department and RWAV to submit business cases for the expanded workforce attraction and retention grants. Grants supporting individual workers should not exceed \$5000 (inc. GST). Services will need to demonstrate how proposed initiatives will support sustainable workforce growth across their region and impact consumers, their families, carers, and supporters.

To access a business case template services should email RWAV via email: [mentalhealth@rwav.com.au](mailto:mentalhealth@rwav.com.au)

## Eligible expenses for services

### Retention costs

Services may access funding to support the retention of their existing mental health workforce based in eligible areas.

This may include:

- External discipline-specific supervision.
- Course fees for professional development and training related to support career advancement in mental health.

Grant funding cannot cover expenses that are:

- (a) ordinarily paid by the employer;
- (b) bonuses;
- (c) towards financial penalties; and
- (d) expenses funded by other Commonwealth, State, Territory or Local Government initiatives.

## Expanded Workforce Attraction and Retention Grant conditions

1. Grants are only accessible pending a business case that has been approved by the department.
2. Grants must be expended in full within 12 months of being awarded. If funding is not expended within 12 months, services will not be able to claim the funding.
3. Grants can only be awarded to existing employees for a minimum of 12 months with a minimum 0.6FTE. Flexibility may be granted for lived and living experience workforce roles employed at a minimum of 0.4FTE.
4. Grants cannot be awarded to employees who have previously received a relocation incentive as part of this program.
5. Services will be reimbursed for approved costs. RWAV will manage reimbursements noting all original receipts and invoices must accompany reimbursement claims.
6. Services must advise RWAV immediately of any changes that impact the approved grant.
7. Services must participate in monitoring and evaluation activities.

Note: By applying, services agree to these conditions.

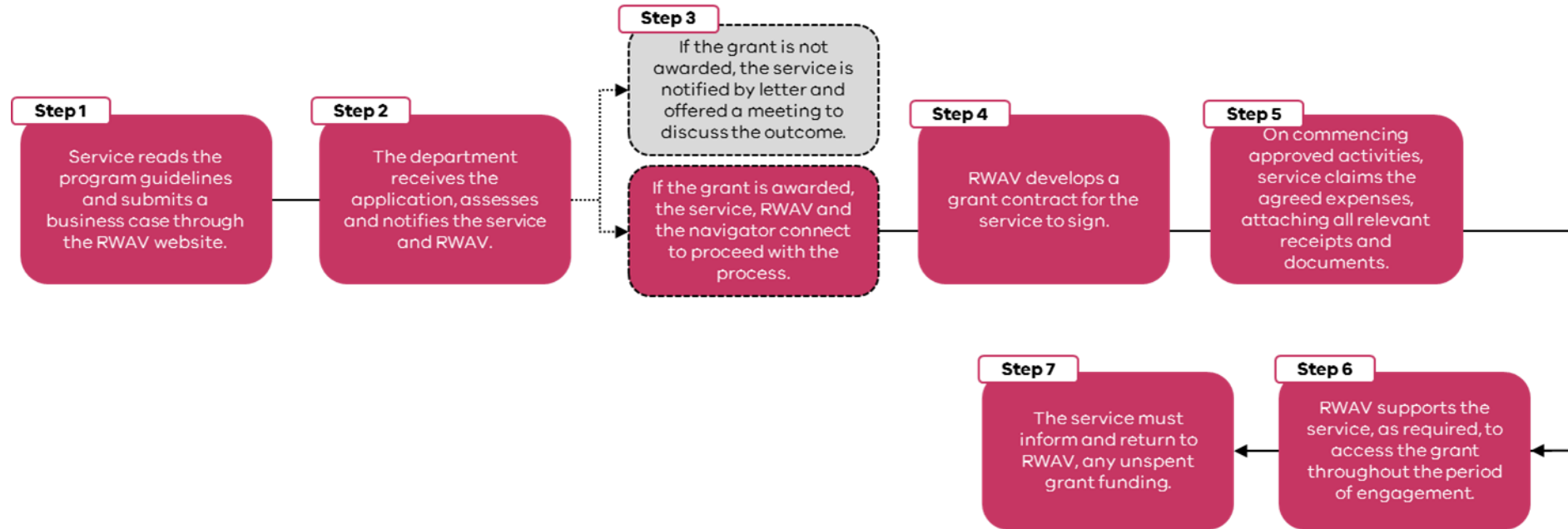
## Processes

To access the grants, services will need to complete the following process to enable support, monitoring and evaluation (also visually demonstrated in **Figure 2** below):

1. Service reads the Guidelines and submits a Business Case. The Business Case template can be accessed by emailing [mentalhealth@rwav.com.au](mailto:mentalhealth@rwav.com.au)

2. The department assesses the application. The department may reach out to the service to clarify points in the application before deciding.
3. The department contacts the service and RWAV with the outcome.
  - if the grant is not awarded, the service will be notified by letter and offered a meeting to discuss the outcome.
  - if the grant is awarded, the service and RWAV will connect to proceed with the grant.
4. RWAV examines the business case and creates a grant contract for the service to sign. During this step, RWAV may provide further guidance to support the service to utilise the grant within the requirements stipulated in this Guideline. The service signs the grant contract and returns it to RWAV.
5. On commencing approved activities, the service claims the agreed expenses, attaching all relevant receipts and documents.
6. RWAV supports the service, as required, to access the grant throughout engagement.
7. The service must inform and return to RWAV, any unspent grant funding.

**Figure 2:** Rural and regional expanded workforce incentive grants process.





## Frequently asked questions

Please review the frequently asked questions below. If you have further questions about the program, please email [mentalhealth@rwav.com.au](mailto:mentalhealth@rwav.com.au).

### **Who is responsible for completing and submitting the workforce incentive grant application?**

The service's nominated key contact and/or Navigator is responsible for completing and submitting grant applications to RWAV. This applies to both workforce incentive grants and other attraction and retention workforce grants.

### **Who is responsible for completing and submitting the expanded workforce attraction and retention grant?**

Eligible services will be responsible for submitting the business case for the expanded workforce attraction and retention grants. RWAV will work with services to develop their business case as required to demonstrate how proposed initiatives will support sustainable workforce growth across their region and impact consumers, their families, carers, and supporters.

### **What information will be required when completing the workforce incentive grant application?**

The application form requests the following information:

- Candidate and role details. Services need to provide copies of:
  - the candidate's current address
  - the position description
  - the employment contract or letter of offer.
- An overview of recruitment difficulties experienced.
- An overview of how the grant will support recruitment and retention. Including which items will be funded through the grant.

### **What information will be required when completing the business case for the expanded workforce attraction and retention grant?**

The business case template is available by emailing [mentalhealth@rwav.com.au](mailto:mentalhealth@rwav.com.au)

The template requests information regarding:

- Purpose
- Problem statement
- Proposed solution
- Implementation plan
- Budget summary
- Expected results.

### **Should the candidate or service pay for expenses (to later be reimbursed)?**

Services and candidates will negotiate who pays for the expenses before reimbursement. If the candidate covers the expenses, they can submit the receipt(s) for reimbursement to RWAV. If the service pays for the expenses, they can submit the receipts for reimbursement to RWAV.

### **Are interstate applicants eligible to receive a grant?**

Yes, eligible candidates relocating from interstate are eligible for a grant.

### **How do I check if an area is eligible?**

For the purposes of this grant, areas defined as MM2 – MM6 are eligible. To check classifications and eligibility please visit: <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/rural-health-workforce/classifications/mmm#how-to-find-current-areas-under-the-mmm>.

### **Are sign-on bonuses in scope?**

No, sign-on bonuses are not eligible for this program.

### **How does the program address accommodation barriers in rural and regional areas?**

Grants can be used to cover initial housing and accommodation costs. For example, rental costs, bond payments and home buying. In addition, services can access grant funding to secure accommodation for grant recipients.

### **Are candidates who have been allocated to a service (through a matching process) eligible for a relocation incentive?**

Candidates completing a rotation, or a placement, are subject to the eligibility requirements within this Guideline.

### **Could the grant be used to support the recruitment of graduates?**

Yes, applications that support the recruitment of graduates may be considered noting that eligibility criteria still apply (including the 24-month contract duration).

### **Could the grant be used to support students completing placement?**

For students completing placement to be eligible for a grant they will have to be completing a role within the health service.

### **Are internal candidates eligible for the grants?**

Internal candidates (people who are already employed at an eligible service) may be eligible to access the program upon assessment of their business proposal.

### **Is there a difference between streams 1 and 2 of the incentive program?**

Yes, the programs differ in terms of candidate and service eligibility. To access the relevant Guidelines for both streams please visit the RWAV website: <https://www.rwav.com.au/regional-mental-health-workforce-incentives/>.

**Where can I find current job vacancies (that may include a grant)?**

Current mental health vacancies can be viewed here: <https://www.rwav.com.au/mental-health-vacancies/>. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list of current vacancies and eligibility requirements apply.