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| ***LEAVING CARE BROKERAGE FUNDS******GUIDELINES******November 2010*** |

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**INTRODUCTION**

# This paper is intended to guide Regions in utilisation of leaving care brokerage funding.

The Victorian community’s vision is that every child has the best possible start in life and thrives, learns and grows, is valued and respected, becoming an effective adult.

The *Children, Youth and Families Act* 2005 (CY&FA) contains provisions for young people subject to Custody and Guardianship to Secretary Orders that place a responsibility on the Secretary to assist their transition from out of home care to independent living.

The Child Protection, Placement and Support Branch, working closely with the Office of Housing and other key service providers, is seeking to ensure that young people leaving care do not enter adulthood isolated, but rather that they are connected to appropriate support networks, their family, community and culture; have the skills and experience to lead an independent and safe life; and have access to the information, advice and assistance they may need in the future.

Leaving care brokerage funding is one way in which these aims can be met. It is provided to enable flexible, creative responses, which promote independence and connections for care leavers.

This advice is written in recognition of each young person’s individual needs and circumstances, allowing for regional discretion to be exercised within the guidelines outlined.

# **ELIGIBILITY**

Leaving care brokerage is restricted to any young person/young adult aged under 21 years who was subject to a Custody or Guardianship to Secretary order on or after their 16th birthday and who is leaving, or has left care to live independently.

# This includes those young people subject to Custody or Guardianship to Secretary orders who left care prior to commencement of the Children, Youth and Family Act (CY&FA) on 23 April 2007 and who are not yet 21 years of age.

# **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEAVING CARE BROKERAGE FUNDS AND OTHER BROKERAGE/ CLIENT EXPENSE FUNDING**

# In order to maximise the impact of the leaving care brokerage funding, it is essential that its utilisation strictly focus on expenditure that explicitly supports the young person’s transition to, or maintenance of successful independent living. It is acknowledged that this may at times require a subjective assessment to be made, however **leaving care brokerage funds should not** **be used for young people leaving care to purchase items that should otherwise have been provided to the young person by a ‘good parent’, for example adequate clothing or footwear, toiletries or dental treatment (eg orthodontic treatment).** These items should be paid for whilst the young person is in care, utilising existing funding sources.

# However in those instances where young people between 18 and 21 years who have left care seek assistance to purchase items such as those noted above, it may be appropriate to utilise the leaving care brokerage funds.

# **LEAVING CARE FUNDING PROVIDED PREVIOUSLY BY REGIONS**

# Consultation with regional staff has identified that there has been a variable approach to the provision of leaving care brokerage support in recent years.

# Some Regions have provided, as standard practice, amounts totalling $2,000 to $3,000 for each young person leaving care. Others have routinely provided $1,000. Others have provided no set amount, rather treating each application based on the young person’s circumstances and needs. All these funds have been sourced from within existing regional budgets.

# In order to ensure that the new CYF Division leaving care brokerage funding does not simply replace funds previously provided by regions, and therefore offer no nett gain for young people, it is required that all young people leaving care receive minimum funding of $1,000 each from existing regional funds **in addition** to the funding available via the new leaving care brokerage funding.

# **Transition to Independence Living Allowance (TILA) – Commonwealth Funding**

TILA is grant of $1500 that may only be accessed once and as a lump sum,

TILA is available to eligible young people between the ages of 15 and 25 years.

NB: Eligibility and access guidelines have altered for the TILA grant – it is important that all workers be aware of this. Information is at <http://www.tila.org.au/>.

**The new eligibility on the TILA website is noted as follows:**

**Target Group for TILA**

TILA (the Allowance) of $1,500 is available to all young people aged between 15 and 25 years who are preparing to, or **have exited**, State or Territory based **Care** and/or informal Care such as: Juvenile Justice; Out of Home Care - including SAAP services; or Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander kinship care arrangements **not more than 24 months ago**. TILA funds are available to assist a maximum of 2,500 young people each financial year. For further information please view the [TILA Guidelines](http://www.tila.org.au/Tila%20PDFs/TILA%20Program%20Guidelines%20July%202009.pdf).

**Given the changes it is important that workers assist young people leaving care to**

**access TILA as soon as is possible post care.**

**Access to TILA is not a prerequisite in accessing Victoria’s Leaving Care brokerage**

**for eligible young people.**

**The Victorian Leaving Care brokerage fund is available:**

* to eligible young people up to 21 years,

# may be accessed on more than one occasion both during transition from care and post care, and

# may be accessed in differing sums subject to the young person’s needs

# **It must be re-iterated however that the allocation of Leaving Care brokerage is subject to regional discretion and judgements based on availability of funds and equity of access.**

# **CONSIDERATIONS FOR ALLOCATION OF BROKERAGE FUNDS**

# **Young people leaving care**

In relation to young people aged 16 - 18 years[[1]](#footnote-1) in the process of leaving care, the following should guide decision making:

(i) As part of transition planning an assessment of each young person’s specific needs to support transition to independence must be undertaken;

(ii) An amount of **no less** than $1,000, sourced from existing regional funds (as discussed above) must be allocated to every young person transitioning to independent living linked to their needs as identified in their transition plan;

(iii) Additional funding required to support a young person’s transition, sourced from the CYF Division leaving care brokerage budget, must be approved by the young person’s care team who will consider need against regional priorities.

(iv) Allocations in excess of $1,000 must be approved by the Regional Leaving Care Alliance (RCLA), or their delegates. There is no maximum limit on the amount of funding to be provided.

(v) RCLA and Community Service Organizations managing leaving care brokerage funds, need to ensure that annual expenditure does not exceed 50% of the available funds, to ensure sufficient brokerage funds for older care leavers seeking support.

**Young people who subsequently seek assistance**

In relation to young people between 16 and 21 years of age who have transitioned to independence but who subsequently seek further support that may require brokerage funding the following should guide decision making:

 (i) Funding of up to $500 in any calendar year can be approved by the post care support provider subject to criteria discussed below;

(ii) Where an assessment of a young person’s needs determines that the young person requires support exceeding $500 in any calendar year, assessment of this need against regional priorities must be approved by the RCLA.

(iii) Assess each young person’s capacity to contribute in order that brokerage payments may be made on a cost-share basis, rather than the full cost of an item being met by the leaving care brokerage funding alone. (Service providers have noted that where a young person has contributed payment to a purchase or service they are more likely to take responsibility for it).

(iv) Assess those young adults (in their 21st years) for an application to TILA. The TILA website is at [www.tila.org.au](http://www.tila.org.au).

**ALTERNATE FUNDING SOURCES**

It is important that post care support providers and RCLA build a body of knowledge of resources and funding sources that young people can access in order to ensure that brokerage funding is used to maximum effect.

Brokerage funding should be sought after it is clear that there is no alternative funding source available. An approach to other departmental programs, other Government programs and community resources should be considered in each case and adequate advice and information given to the young person to empower them to negotiate these networks.

# **WHAT CAN BE APPLIED FOR?**

##### Young people up to 18 years of age who are transitioning from care

It is the shared responsibility of the care team to ensure that every detail of the young person’s assessed needs are identified and detailed in the transition plan. Consistent with the Transition Plan, funds can be provided for:

* **Accommodation** costs associated with setting up or maintaining accommodation;
* **Education, training and employment** costs enabling a young person to successfully complete training or education – eg. Laptop, printer, books, course enrolment fees and including contribution to child care costs where the young person is a full time carer; transport costs to seek advice on education / training / voluntary work, to complete education / training / voluntary work or to attend an interview;
* **Access to health and community services** eg. gaps in the cost of essential medical equipment and specialist health needs requiring further attention or treatment.
* **Life skills education and connection to community** eg. Enhancing life skills such as cooking, budgeting, driver education; Transport costs to maintain links with family and community; or costs associated with continuing recreational activities.

# **Young adults 18 years up to 21 years of age**

# **Young adults who have made the transition to independence may subsequently present with specific needs for example:**

* **Accommodation** costs associated with setting up or maintaining accommodation or for contribution towards a debt that could result in the young person being evicted or made homeless;
* **Education/training/employment** - enabling a young person to successfully complete training or education – eg. Laptop, printer, books, course enrolment fees and including contribution to child care costs where the young person is a full time carer; transport costs to seek advice on education / training / voluntary work, to complete education / training / voluntary work or to attend an interview; to purchase clothing or equipment to attend an interview/ to commence training.
* **Access to health and community services** - to facilitate and/or maintain a young person’s access to health services eg interim service whilst on a waiting list, or assistance with a co-payment.

**WHAT BROKERAGE FUNDS *CANNOT* BE USED FOR**

As previously discussed, brokerage is **not** intended for:

* Program funding or staffing costs.
* items, equipment or treatment that should have been obtained prior to the young person’s transition;
* health care costs that can be met directly or at least partially reimbursed through Medicare and attending medical clinics willing to bulk bill;
* specialist services including physiotherapy, chiropractic, psychology and psychiatric, and audio/hearing treatments that have not been approved before the proposed treatment;
* Other items which do not support the young person to attain or maintain independence.

PROCESS FOR ACCESSING BROKERAGE FUNDS

Each Region will determine processes for accessing brokerage funds and the reporting processes; however it is strongly recommended that the community service organisation that provides post care support, referral and information also be responsible for the Leaving Care brokerage funds.

Each RLCA is requested to put in place prioritising criteria and monitoring systems for the utilisation of leaving care brokerage funds to ensure they are being used effectively.

**RECORDING ALLOCATION OF BROKERAGE FUNDS**

Payment of brokerage funds for young people transitioning from state care **must** be recorded on CRIS as a case note, and the ‘Youth’ case on CRISSP. . This is a particularly important record given that financial assistance to young people transitioning to independence will inform potential later requests for funding support.

It is also important to bear in mind that young people who have transitioned may subsequently present in more than one DHS region. For this reason the central Leaving Care Advisory Group has approved the registering of young people as ‘unrestricted’ on the CRISSP ‘Youth’ case. This will result in young people’s accessing of leaving care services being visible on the Common Client Layer (CCL) of CRISSP. This will assist in the provision of Leaving Care services to young people who are no longer in their region of origin.

The regional post care support provider is required to report on and acquit expenditure of leaving care brokerage funds to the RCLA.

**BROKERAGE UTILISATIOIN ACQUITTAL**

As has been stated, leaving care brokerage funds should be used to promote independence and connections for young people transitioning from care and for those who subsequently return seeking assistance. Regular review of expenditure of brokerage funds is required. One role of the RLCA is to ensure the effective utilization of brokerage funds through the review and monitoring of expenditure.

A review schedule commencing from 1 January 2009 for Leaving Care services, including brokerage expenditure has been established as part of the interim monitoring tool. Completed brokerage expenditure acquittals to be forwarded on a quarterly basis to the Placement and Support Unit as follows:

31 December 2009

31 March 2010

30 June 2010

30 September 2010

31 December 2010

Any questions about Brokerage Support Funds should be directed to Maria Trombin, Senior Program Advisor at maria.trombin@dhs.vic.gov.au or telephone 9096 3012.

**Placement and Support Branch**

**December 2009**

1. It should be noted that it is anticipated that the numbers of young people aged under 17 years of age leaving care will reduce in future years. Only in rare circumstances is it likely that a young person aged 16 years of age will be ready to live independently. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)