

Pharmacy Teams Relief Fund Policy and Process

Policy

Purpose

1. It has been recognised that the COVID-19 pandemic has created a significant increase in workload for community pharmacy teams. The purpose of the Pharmacy Team Relief Fund (the Fund) is to provide targeted relief for community pharmacy teams who have become over-stretched due to extra work caused by circumstances related to the pandemic.

Introduction

2. The Ministry of Health (the Ministry) has provided a fund of \$1.7 million (the Fund) for the Pharmacy Council (the Council) to administer for workload relief of over-stretched pharmacy teams.
3. The key objectives expected by the Ministry include:
 - a. Use of the funds until they run out, or until 30 June 2021, whichever comes first. Any funds left over are to be returned to the Ministry.
 - b. For the benefit of targeted pharmacy teams, especially:
 - providing services to communities with significant Māori and/or Pacific peoples patient bases
 - with early-career pharmacists
 - in remote areas
 - in high deprivation areas
4. The Council has set up processes, and believes the need is such, that all funds will be allocated probably before 31 December 2020.
5. It is acknowledged that the administration of this Fund does not necessarily fit perfectly with Council's usual business within the pharmacy sector. The Council is confident that actions taken to separate the administration of the fund from the Council's regulatory arm, will allay any concerns in the sector about the Council's role in bringing relief to over-stretched community pharmacy teams.

Eligibility Criteria

6. The Fund is primarily targeted to pharmacy teams (practising pharmacist(s) and/or technician(s)) working in independently owned or franchised community pharmacies. They will meet **one or more** of the following criteria:
 - a. Community pharmacy, particularly:
 - i. With a significant Māori and/or Pacific peoples base
 - ii. In a high deprivation area
 - iii. Providing Clozapine dispensing and/or opioid substitution treatment
 - iv. Remote location (estimate of how far away the next nearest pharmacy is)
 - b. Early career pharmacists (10 years or fewer since graduating)
 - c. Have experienced demonstrable causes and/or symptoms of stress since March 2020, particularly:

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- i. Regularly working as sole charge
 - ii. Those who have indicators of stress
 - iii. Worked (or working) excessive hours over a prolonged period of time
- d. The pharmacy owner/employer (the employer) has difficulty finding locum cover.

Fund Administration

7. The Fund will be administered using a high trust model requiring a declaratory statement by the employer, and evidence that those employed for relief are employed and remunerated as expected.
8. The Fund will be administered in three, approximately equal, tranches; to enable effective prioritisation and equity across possible applicants.
9. If a significant barrier to making a successful application is identified, tranches two and/or three maybe issued on different terms. This will be at the discretion of the Fund administrators, who will advise all practising pharmacists and other stakeholders.
10. Council's Fund administration costs will be met by the Fund and are not expected to exceed 4.5% of the Fund.

Fund Principles

11. The Council encourages pharmacists and their employers to be considerate of each other's relief needs. Barriers to receiving a benefit from the Fund have been reduced as much as possible by Council. Council expects employers to enable, as much as possible, relief provided by the Fund to benefit an employer's pharmacy team.
12. The Council trusts that the information provided in an application for pharmacy team relief is true and correct. The information provided in an application should be able to withstand scrutiny, in the event a check is made, with corresponding information being obtainable from the pharmacy.
13. Council strongly encourages employers to employ pharmacy relief team members (pharmacist(s) and/or technician(s)) at, or above, the minimum rates outlined in Section 30. Any amount above these rates is at the discretion of, and cost to the employer. The intention of the Fund is that rates are paid out in full to the pharmacy relief team members. The benefit of the fund to the employer is that relief is provided to their own pharmacy team; the benefit to a pharmacy relief team member is that they are fairly paid for their services, and flexibility in providing the services.

Application Principles

14. Applicants may be community pharmacy owners/employers (employers) or community pharmacist employees. Pharmacist employees will make a joint application with their employers to engage relief for their own pharmacy team.
15. Once a pharmacy has a successful application, no further applications should be made for that pharmacy. Council's intent is to distribute the benefits as widely as possible, while still maintaining the targeted criteria. Applications will be checked to

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ensure allocation of Fund relief is not made to the same licensed premises more than once.

16. The quantity of relief is expected to be in the order one pharmacist's and one technician's services for 3-5 days per pharmacy license. The length of the period applied for may depend on whether the pharmacy relief team is working alongside the existing pharmacy team or replacing existing pharmacy team members for a period of time.
17. The Council will ensure it has a robust decision-making process to prioritise applications.

Process

Fund Application Invitation

18. Invitations to apply for relief will be sent to all practising pharmacists for each of the three tranches via email. The opening date and expiry date for applications for each tranche will be advised in the emails and will be published on the Council's website.

Application

19. An application form will be submitted either by an employer, or jointly by a pharmacist and their employer. The application will advise the Fund administrators of the type and extent of relief being sought.
20. Applications will be evaluated by:
 - a. Prioritising applications according to the criteria by assessing the metrics provided by applicants, the number of criteria met, and the supporting information.
 - b. Assessing the quantity of funding required for each application.
 - c. Higher priority applications within the limit of approximately one third of the Fund, for each tranche, are expected to be successful.
21. An employer may apply to use a known pharmacist(s) and/or technician(s) for relief services. An estimate of any reimbursable accommodation and/or travel costs required by them will be advised by the employer on the application form.
22. An employer may apply for a pharmacy relief team to provide services. In this case, the Fund administrators will provide C.V.s of suggested pharmacist(s) and/or technician(s) to the employer. The employer will advise the Fund administrators of estimates of any reimbursable accommodation needs and/or travel costs for the pharmacy relief team once the employer has contacted the pharmacy relief team members about their requirements.
23. The Fund administrators will make the best endeavours to suggest pharmacy relief teams to employers, where and when requested. However, it is not possible to guarantee that pharmacy relief teams will always be available for requested dates.
24. The Council will convene an independent panel to evaluate application prioritisation and Fund administrator decisions, according to the stated criteria, to provide consistency in decision making.

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25. Notification of successful or unsuccessful applications will be sent to applicants via email.
26. Successful applications are those who meet sufficient criteria, and are allocated funds, for relief. If the funds in the tranche are required for pharmacy teams with a higher need, we will advise you that your application has been unsuccessful.
27. Unsuccessful applications may be held for tranches 2 and/or 3 where an employer advises the Fund administrators, they do not wish to make a new application. Held applications will then go through the prioritisation process again with the new applications in the next tranche(s).

Reimbursement Agreement

28. The Council will offer a Reimbursement Agreement to employers whose applications are successful. The Reimbursement Agreement will include the name(s), dates and hours relief teams will work, accommodation allowance quantities, as well as the maximum travel costs the Fund will reimburse. Once the agreement is signed and returned to the Fund administrators, the employer may make arrangements for relief with the pharmacist(s) and/or technician(s).
29. The employer will provide the pharmacist(s) and/or technician(s) with an employment/services contract. The contract will include the hourly pay rate, and any accommodation compensation and/or travel costs to be paid/covered by the employer.
30. The maximum rates the Fund will reimburse to the employer on invoice (with a copy of relief team member's employment/services contract, and supporting receipts where necessary):
 - a. For a pharmacist providing relief, \$50.00 per hour
 - b. For a technician providing relief, \$25.00 per hour
 - c. For accommodation and food, either for a relief pharmacist or technician, a flat rate of \$200/person/night allowance
 - d. For distances over 20km each way, to and from, the pharmacy, \$0.79/kilometre in a private car (as per IRD rates)
 - e. For extensive travel, as agreed by the Fund administrators, reimbursement will be made to the employer on invoice with supporting receipts.
31. These are the minimum rates the employer should include in the employment/services contract offered to relief pharmacist(s) or technicians. Any amount above these rates is at the discretion of, and cost to, the employer.
32. In the event an employment/services contract states lower pay rates than those outlined in Section 30., the lower amount will be reimbursed to the employer. The Fund is for the benefit of over-stretched pharmacy relief teams, not pharmacy businesses. Council expects employers to ensure that the amount reimbursed is paid in full to relief pharmacy team members.

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33. Once the pharmacy employer has received pharmacy team relief services, they will send the following to Council with their request for reimbursement:
- an itemised invoice (including relief team members' payroll records),
 - copy of the employment/services contract(s), signed by both parties,
 - copy of any travel receipts, (accommodation is paid at a flat rate; no receipts are required)
 - a short summary (2-3 sentences) of how the relief was used, for example, general tasks and which pharmacy team role(s) benefitted from the relief (this is a requirement as it forms part of Council's reporting obligations to the Ministry of Health; no identifying details will be shared with the Ministry).

Council will then reimburse the employer from the Fund as soon as possible (expected within 7 days of the invoice and supporting evidence being received).

Pharmacist or Technician Providing Services

34. The Fund administrators will seek offers to provide pharmacy services from pharmacists and technicians via email.
35. Pharmacists providing services will have the following:
- Registered, with a current practising certificate – APC expiry 31 March 2021, or emergency practising certificate (EPC).
 - At least 3 years' community pharmacy experience
 - Available for periods until Friday 18 December 2020, in the first instance, or until end March 2021
 - Extra services training beneficial
36. Technicians will have the following:
- New Zealand Certificate in Pharmacy – Pharmacy Technician, level 5 or above
 - At least 2 years' experience in community pharmacy work
 - Available for periods until Friday 18 December 2020, in the first instance, or until end March 2021
37. Where an employer has requested that the Fund administrators suggest pharmacist(s) and/or technician(s) to provide pharmacy relief services, the Fund administrator will endeavour to team up a pharmacist and technician, as a pharmacy relief team, to provide services to the employer. These will mostly be allocated according to location.
38. Once the employer, and the pharmacy relief team, have mutually accepted the assignment of services, the employer will provide the pharmacy relief team members with employment/services contracts. Minimum expected pay rates and reimbursable accommodation allowance/travel costs are outlined in Section 30.
39. The other terms and conditions of the employment/services contract are a matter entirely between the employer and any pharmacist or technician who is offered the contract. Neither Council, nor the Fund administrators, will be involved in any way, or make any comment or judgement on the contents of employment/service contracts offered.

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Accommodation and travel

40. General expectations are that accommodation could be required where more than an hour and a half's travel would be incurred each way, for providing pharmacy relief services to a pharmacy. Where the Fund administrators agree, a flat-rate accommodation and food allowance of \$200.00 per person, per night will be reimbursed to the employer.
41. In the event that a pharmacist/technician is required to travel more than 20km each way to the pharmacy receiving relief, the employer is able to claim mileage at the IRD rate of \$0.79/kilometre on their behalf.
42. Estimated costs of significant travel such as flights and/or rental cars will be provided by the employer to the Fund administrators; reimbursement will be made to the employer when the invoice and required documents are presented with supporting travel receipts. The Council expects this need will be minimal.
43. The Council expects the full benefits of allowances and travel compensation to be passed on to the relief pharmacist or technician.