

Vehicle Modification Subsidy Scheme
Guidelines
June 2008

Introduction

The establishment of a Vehicle Modification Subsidy Scheme (VMSS) within the Victorian Aids and Equipment Program (A&EP) is a key new initiative included as part of the 2007-2008 budget announcement by the Victorian Government. A vehicle modification scheme will enhance the capacity of the A&EP to support people with a disability living in the community.

Background

Victorian Aids and Equipment Program

The Aids and Equipment Program (A&EP) provides people with a disability, including children and young people and frail older people, with subsidised aids, equipment, domiciliary oxygen and home modifications to enhance their safety and independence, reduce reliance on carers and prevent admission to institutional care or high cost services.

Originally established by the Australian Government in 1981 as the Program of Aids for Disabled People (PADP), the program was transferred to the States and Territories in 1987. In 2007-08, the program will assist over 26,000 Victorians with aids and equipment.

Program Structure and Function

The A&EP is administered by Disability Services on behalf of the Department of Human Services (DHS). Funding for the A&EP is directed through the 8 DHS regions to 26 localised and 5 specialist state-wide services.

The A&EP provides subsidies or equipment loans for a range of items including wheelchairs, walking aids, continence aids, breast prosthesis and orthoses. A full list of items and the applicable subsidy level available for items is outlined in the A&EP program guidelines available at <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/ds/aep>

An assessment by a health professional is required to apply to the program for assistance. The health professional (often referred to as the prescribing therapist), determines the most appropriate and cost effective type of aid or equipment, required to meet a person's needs. The health professional is also required to assess the applicant's and/or their carer's ability to operate the aid, equipment or home modification, safely and effectively.

The A&EP is a subsidy program. As such applicants may be required to fund the difference between the subsidy level and the cost of the equipment/home modification prescribed. The A&EP does not fund the cost of assessments or the process involved in completing assessments.

Objectives/key principles of the Vehicle Modification Subsidy Scheme

Core Principles

A set of core principles specific to the VMSS, have been identified to better reflect the intent of the scheme.

- Facilitating independence, maximum community participation and access
- Implementing the principles of the Disability State Plan
- Ensuring modifications are appropriate and cost effective
- Ensuring applicant choice while taking into consideration assessed need
- Ensuring transparent and equitable subsidy allocation in a timely manner

The core principles are in addition to the A&EP program guidelines and are not intended to override the general A&EP guidelines, eligibility or prioritisation criteria.

Service Model

The VMSS will be provided as part of the Aids and Equipment Program. The A&EP program guidelines will provide the overarching framework for the allocation of all vehicle modification subsidies.

Where necessary the A&EP guidelines will be revised to reflect the availability of vehicle modifications subsidies. All applications for vehicle modifications will be assessed under the specific vehicle modifications subsidy scheme guidelines as well as the general A&EP guidelines. Consistency and transparency around the allocation of the subsidies is a key consideration.

Eligibility

Eligibility for a vehicle modification subsidy is consistent with the broader A&EP guidelines. A person must:

- Be a permanent resident of Victoria
- Or hold a:
 - Temporary Protection Visa (Visa 785)
 - Bridging Visa A asylum seeker
 - Bridging Visa E asylum seeker
- Have a permanent or long term Disability and/or frail aged
- Require vehicle modifications from the available list on a permanent or long term basis.

Vehicle modifications are available to Victorians with a permanent or long term disability. Capacity exists to provide assistance to;

- People requiring vehicle modifications to drive their primary vehicle due to their disability; and
- People with a disability requiring modifications to travel as passengers in their primary vehicle, including children and their families.

In accordance with A&EP guidelines, a person is not eligible if they are entitled to receive assistance from other government funded aids and equipment programs or entitled to any form of compensation related to their disability. Some examples of people who may be ineligible include people who would be able to receive assistance from;

- The Transport Accident Commission (TAC)
- Victorian Workcover Authority
- Government funded Residential Aged Care Facilities or an Extended Aged Care at Home (EACH) package
- Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) Gold Card holders
- Federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations under the Workplace Modification Program (WMP)
- An existing insurance policy where a vehicle modification is available.

While this list is not extensive, reference should be made to the A&EP guidelines.

Subsidy Level

A maximum subsidy of up to \$10,000 may be provided, to assist Victorians with a disability to purchase prescribed vehicle modifications to suit their individual needs. The subsidy is intended as a contribution towards the purchase cost of modifications and is not intended to meet the full cost of all vehicle modifications.

Subsidies are approved to individuals, on the basis of one subsidy for the modification of the primary vehicle utilised for the person's transport. Capacity does not exist to provide subsidies

for the modification of multiple vehicles or for the modification of vehicles owned by organisations.

Use of partial subsidy

Where only a portion of the maximum subsidy is required by an individual to meet their vehicle modification needs, the individual may submit further applications for assistance, up to a cumulative total of \$10,000 over a seven year period, from the date of their first application. All subsequent applications will be subject to the A&EP and vehicle modification subsidy approval and prioritisation criteria.

The seven year subsidy timeline recognises people's changing needs and offers the flexibility in the capacity of the scheme to meet people's needs throughout key life stages.

Type and Range of Modifications

A variety of vehicle modifications are covered by the scheme, include minor modifications such as hand controls and major modifications such as hoists and ramps. Applicants, with assistance from their prescribing therapist along with advice from specialist engineers and VicRoads as required, will be able to select the most appropriate and safe modification or combination of modifications to best suit their individual needs.

Subsidies are available for

- Conversion of vehicle for wheelchair access
- Ramps secured to vehicle
- Specialised lifters, carriers, and trailers for wheelchairs
- Modified driving controls
- Specialised seats
- Air conditioning for people with thermo-regulatory conditions

Funding is not available under the vehicle modification subsidy scheme for the purchase of

- Modifications that do not comply with Australian Design Rules or would not comply with VicRoads Standards for Registration (refer VicRoads, Vehicle Standards Information 8 'Guide to Modifications to Motor Vehicles)
- Second Hand Equipment
- Equipment already available under the general A&EP criteria including portable ramps, child car seats, wheelchair harnesses etc.
- Items generally available for purchase including rear vision cameras and rear parking sensors, global positioning system devices, mirrors, cruise control, window tinting, standard trailers etc.
- Vehicle running costs, statutory charges or insurance premiums
- New or second hand vehicles
- Modifications of vehicles owned by organisations

Second hand modified vehicles

Funding may be approved as a partial subsidy towards the cost of any modification components of an already modified vehicle. A vehicle modification subsidy is not available as a contribution towards the purchase cost of second hand vehicles.

Repairs and Maintenance

While the VMSS assists in the purchase of vehicle modifications, on completion of a modification and payment of the agreed subsidy contribution by the A&EP provider, the vehicle owner assumes ownership of the modification/s. The vehicle owner is responsible for on-going maintenance or repairs relating to the modification/s including liaison with suppliers around any warranty provisions.

Priority of access

Priority of access will be in accordance with existing A&EP guidelines that is:

A vehicle modification subsidy will be provided as soon as funds are available.

Criteria

- The provision of the vehicle modification is critical to the safety of the applicant and injury prevention to carers in daily living activities
- The non availability of a vehicle modification will lead to a deterioration of the applicants health or functioning abilities, which may result in premature admission to institutional care, hospitalisation or dependence on more costly services
- Vehicle modifications will assist in maintaining existing care-giving arrangements

Prescription and Assessment

An assessment and prescription is required as part of the application process, to ensure that a proposed vehicle modification is the most appropriate to meet an individual's needs.

Prescription and assessment processes will be in accordance with the broader A&E program.

- A medical practitioner is responsible for the **initial** certification to establish the diagnosis of a permanent or long term disability (NB. people who have previously been assisted through the Aids and Equipment Program will not require another certificate)
- Under the Aids and Equipment Program, therapists and other specialist assessors are required to provide assessments in the relevant equipment category.
- For all vehicle modification applications, an assessment will be required to be completed by an Occupational Therapist (OT). In certain circumstances, a VicRoads accredited specialist OT driver assessor will be required to assess a person with a disability needs' in respect to vehicle modifications.
- All applications must be approved and prioritised for subsidy contributions by the relevant A&EP Issuing Centre prior to a purchase being made by the vehicle owner.
- The A&EP does not fund the cost of assessments or the process involved in completing assessments

Responsibilities of:

The Prescribing Therapist:

- Prepare applications in accordance with the Victorian A&EP guidelines and professional practice.
- Establish that the applicant and/or their carer have the cognitive, physical and psychological ability to operate the vehicle modification safely and effectively.
- Complete Vehicle Modification Prescription Form (Attachment A) with detailed specifications, recommendations and justification as to the most appropriate and cost effective modification, the recommended supplier, and details of customisation to the Victorian A&EP Issuing Centre.
- Discuss alternative available transport options with applicant and vehicle owner
- Provide advice to applicant/vehicle owner around any additional assessments or information required to complete the application
- Be available to discuss the assessment report and recommendations with the VMSS issuing centre and amend the recommendations where appropriate.
- Inform the applicant/vehicle owner of possible alternatives to the prescribed aid or equipment
- Ensure training is provided to applicant and/or the vehicle owner in the safe use of their aid/equipment.
- Discuss with applicant and the vehicle owner the vehicle running costs as well as the ongoing equipment maintenance costs associated with the modification and confirm applicant's capacity to meet the ongoing costs.
- Provide a certificate of completion to the A&EP Issuing Centre on satisfactory completion of modifications to verify completion.

The A&EP Issuing Centre:

The A&EP Issuing Centre is responsible for

- Scrutinising the vehicle modification subsidy applications for suitability, cost effectiveness and the justification of the recommended modification
- Seek clarification from the client or the prescribing therapist around the recommended modification where required
- Ensuring that the referring therapist or assessor (as required) has determined that the applicant and/or their carer have the cognitive, physical and psychological ability to operate the vehicle modification safely and effectively
- Ensuring the applicant/vehicle owner and occupational therapist completes the certificate of completion once the vehicle modifications have been satisfactorily completed
- Seeking appropriate professional advice to review assessments where required including the convening of the Vehicle Modification Pane
- Ensuring the applicant/vehicle owner and the Vehicle Modification Organisation signs the tripartite agreement and the applicant/vehicle owner signs the deed poll at attachment B.
- Arrange payment to vehicle modification organisation once certificate of completion in attachment B has been completed.

The Applicant/Vehicle Owner:

The applicant is responsible for

- Providing specific information as requested to complete application for subsidy assistance
- Undertaking assessments as required and agreed, to complete subsidy application
- Payment of any costs associated with assessments conducted by professionals, in completing the application
- Contributing to any cost of a vehicle modification which is above the approved subsidy amount. Payments to the vehicle modification organisation should be made following completion of certificate of completion
- Establishing through the vehicle conversion organisation/s that the proposed modifications comply with VicRoads' requirements and other relevant authority's requirements.
- Verifying with VicRoads and other relevant authorities around any approvals required for vehicle modifications
- Completing the certificate of completion in once the vehicle modifications have been satisfactorily completed
- Provide copies of any certificates to the Issuing Centre to facilitate payment of suppliers on satisfactory completion of the modifications.
- Providing relevant copy of Vehicle Assessment Signatory Scheme (VASS) certificate to VicRoads

Application Process

Applications for subsidy assistance under the vehicle modification subsidy scheme will require an assessment and the completion of relevant application and prescription forms. The forms are required to be lodged for consideration with the

Vehicle Modification Subsidy Scheme
Ballarat Health Services
102 Ascot Street South
Ballarat Victoria 3350

Vehicle Modification Prescription Form

A prescription form specifically for use in the application for a vehicle modification subsidy will be required to be completed. The prescription form will facilitate a level of consistency in the assessment and prescription process for therapists and applicants. A prescription form is included for your information (**Attachment A**).

Individual Choice

Individuals will be able to choose their preferred vehicle converter, with guidance provided by prescribing therapists through recommendations around the most appropriate and cost effective modifications to meet an individual's needs.

VicRoads

Vehicle owners are responsible for ensuring that all vehicle modifications comply with all applicable Standards for Registration which include Australian Design Rules (ADRs). Vehicle owners should refer to the VicRoads Vehicle Standards Information Sheet Number 8 (VSI 8), "Guide to Modifications for Motor Vehicles" for information on VicRoads requirements relating to modifications. Further information is also available by contacting VicRoads on 1300 360 745.

Insurance

The vehicle modification scheme does not provide insurance for vehicles or the vehicle modification. As per the general A&EP guidelines it is recommended that the vehicle owner has appropriate insurance coverage for their vehicle to include the vehicle modifications. Vehicle owners are responsible for notifying their insurer of any modifications to their vehicle.

Service Provider/Delivery model

In seeking to establish a streamlined application and administration process, a single state-wide issuing centre will manage the vehicle modification subsidy scheme across Victoria. A single state-wide service is consistent with similar programs operating around Australia including the Western Australian Vehicle Modification Grants managed by the Independent Living Centre of Western Australia, the Victorian Breast Prosthesis Subsidy Program and the Victorian Electronic Devices Scheme. The single issuing centre will be able to develop specialist knowledge and systems around the evaluation and approval of vehicle modification subsidies.

The specialist centre will be responsible for:

- Acting as a central point of contact for the provision and distribution of information relating to the VMSS.
- Ensuring that the service is accessible to the eligible target group, referring therapists and relevant stakeholders
- Ensuring timely processing of subsidy applications and payment of subsidies as per the relevant guidelines
- Establishing links with regional representatives across the state
- Authorising the payment of agreed subsidy amounts to vehicle modifying organisations on satisfactory completion of works including gathering of appropriately issued and signed completion certificates.

Vehicle Modification Review Panel

A Vehicle Modification Review Panel (VMRP) comprising up to ten members will provide advice around the interpretation of the vehicle modification guidelines. The VMRP members will convene as required to provide advice on eligibility and the appropriateness of modifications recommended in applications.

The VMRP will be initially established for a 12 month period and any ongoing role will be subject to a review.

A minimum of three panel members would be required to form a quorum for a panel to convene.

The VMRP will comprise members from

- Disability and community services organisations (5 members)
- People with a disability (2 members)
- A&EP Issuing Centre Co-ordinators (2 members)
- Department of Human Services (1 member)

Specialist advice may be sought or experts may be seconded as required to assist in the decision making process eg. VicRoads etc.

The VMRP will also provide advice around applications under exceptional circumstances and in the review of decisions as necessary. The VMRP will provide advice within the context of the A&EP and the vehicle modification guidelines.

The VMRP may also be able to make suggestions for proposed changes to the vehicle modifications subsidy scheme.

The issuing centre administering the scheme will be responsible for convening the panel as required.

Evaluation

The Vehicle Modification Subsidy Scheme is subject to ongoing monitoring as part of its implementation and operation. An external evaluation of the scheme will be undertaken and it is anticipated that an evaluation report will be provided twelve months after the implementation of the scheme.

Attachment A Prescription Form

Attachment B Tripartite Agreement and Deed