VISITING OPTOMETRISTS SCHEME
Grant Programme Guidelines

Effective 1 July 2015

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Grant Programme Process Flowchart

| **APPLICATION** |
| Applicant completes an application. |

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| **SUBMIT AN APPLICATION** |
| Applicant submits an application. |

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| **ASSESSMENT** |
| The application is accepted. The application is assessed against Selection Criteria (eligibility and assessment criteria). |

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| **ADVICE TO THE APPROVER** |
| Advice is provided to the funding **Approver** on the merits of each application against the Programme Guidelines and application requirements. |

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| **DECISION/NOTIFICATION** |
| The Approver makes a decision on the application and the department advises successful applicants. |

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| **CONTRACT/FUNDING** |
| An agreement is negotiated and signed by the applicant and the department. Unsuccessful applicants are then informed of the outcomes of their applications. |

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| **DO/COMPLETE/ACQUIT** |
| Funding recipient undertakes activity and completes milestones. Funding recipient provides performance report and final report. Department makes payments, monitors progress and collates reports. |

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| **EVALUATION** |
| Department evaluates the outcomes of the Programme. Funding recipient provides information to assist this evaluation. |

1.   Introduction

1.1.   Programme Background

The Australian Government is providing funding for the Visiting Optometrists Scheme (the programme) through a targeted non-competitive funding round.

The programme was established in 1975 to provide funding to optometrists to deliver outreach eye care services to people living in regional, rural and remote locations, who do not have ready access to primary eye care services.

In 2009-10 the programme was expanded to provide increased optometry services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly in remote and very remote locations.

The total funding available for the programme for the period of 2014-15 to 2015-16 is $12.9 million (GST Exclusive).

Table 1: Indicative Funding breakdown by State / Territory across financial years

State	Funding to individual optometrists 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015* $ million (GST excl)	Funding to fund holders From execution of funding agreement to 30 June 2015** $ million (GST exc.)	2015-16 $ million (GST exc.)
New South Wales	0.80	0.30	1.1
Queensland	1.07	0.30	1.4
Northern Territory	0.98	0.30	1.3
Western Australia	0.98	0.30	1.3
South Australia	0.37	0.14	0.7
Tasmania	0.24	0.14	0.3
Victoria	0.24	0.14	0.5
TOTAL	**4.68**	**1.62**	**6.6**

* Funds have been allocated to fund individual Optometrists to provide ongoing services from 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015

**Funding to be provided to fund holders for needs analysis, planning & recruitment in relation to 2015-16.

The *Evaluation of the Medical Specialist Outreach Assistance Program and the Visiting Optometrists Scheme1*(the Evaluation), contained a number of recommendations to enhance the programme. In response to these recommendations, the Department of Health (the department) is introducing fund holder arrangements for the programme, with a single jurisdictional fund holder to be appointed in each state and the Northern Territory.

Fund holders will manage the delivery of optometry services funded via the programme and will be responsible for recruiting optometrists to provide outreach services in regional, rural and remote locations. It is expected that these fund holders will deliver efficiencies and maximise capacity for coordination of services delivered by eye care teams covering the full range of eye health services, based on a single needs assessment and planning process for this programme, the Rural Health Outreach Fund (RHOF) and the Medical Outreach – Indigenous Chronic Disease Programme (MOICDP).

Fund holders will be funded from execution of funding agreements to 30 June 2015 to undertake planning and recruitment activities that will facilitate commencement of optometry services from 1 July 2015. From 1 July 2015, fund holders will be funded in accordance with Table 1, above.

The organisations being targeted under the programme have been selected as a result of an open competitive round conducted in early 2012 and were assessed in terms of their capacity to undertake needs assessment and planning processes, and effectively manage and coordinate delivery of outreach eye health services.

1.2.   Programme Purpose, Scope, Objectives and Outcomes

The purpose of the programme is to improve the detection of eye disease and ensure appropriate referrals for treatment and ongoing management. The scope is to provide services for people in regional, rural and remote locations across Australia.

The objectives of the programme are to improve eye health for people living in regional, rural and remote locations by:

- Increasing the availability of optometry services in areas of identified need;
- Improving the coordination and integration of those eye health services and the quality of ongoing patient care; and
- Enhancing communication between visiting optometrists, local health providers and other visiting health professionals.

To achieve these objectives, fund holders are funded to manage and coordinate the delivery of optometry services in line with the Visiting Optometrists Scheme Service Delivery Standards.

1.3.   Consultation

The 2012 *Evaluation of the Medical Specialist Outreach Assistance Program and Visiting Optometrists Scheme* contained a number of recommendations to enhance the programme and is available on the Rural and Regional Health Australia website.

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[1] *Evaluation of the Medical Specialist Outreach Assistance Program and the Visiting Optometrists Scheme,* Health Policy Analysis Limited, 25 January 2012.

The Evaluation highlighted the need for improved coordination and integration of eye health services across the continuum of eye health providers and recommended the implementation of fund holder arrangements. These recommendations have informed the design of the programme.

Key eye health organisations, including Optometry Australia and Vision 2020 Australia have also been consulted about the redesign of the programme.

1.4. Relevant legislation

The programme draws its administrative authority from the *Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines* (CGRGs) that are issued by the Minister for Finance under the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013 (PGPA Act). The legal authority for the programme is *Financial Framework (Supplementary Powers) Act 1997* Schedule 1AA, Part 4, item 415.024, in conjunction with Section 129A of the *Health Insurance Act 1973: Special Arrangements for Optometrical Services*, which states that:

"the Minister may on behalf of the Commonwealth make such special arrangements with participating optometrists as he/she thinks fit for the purpose of ensuring that an adequate optometrical service will be available to persons living in isolated areas".

Staff involved in grants administration are accountable for complying with the CGRGs and the PGPA Act and other policies and legislation that interact with grants administration.

1.5. Roles and Responsibilities

The *Grant Programme Process Flowchart* on page 3 outlines the general roles and responsibilities of each party. The roles and responsibilities of the Approver, the department and funding recipients are more broadly described below.

Department of Health

The department manages the programme. It is responsible for the development and dissemination of all documentation regarding funding under the programme and for ensuring that documentation is in accordance with the programme's objectives and priorities. The department is also responsible for notifying applicants of the outcome of any funding process, responding to queries in relation to the funding process, and for resolving any uncertainties that may arise in relation to funding requirements.

The department will be responsible for decisions regarding the internal administrative, assessment recommendations and programme management arrangements under the programme, including:

- assessing the applications;
- developing funding agreements or any alternative contractual arrangement;
- monitoring the performance of projects to ensure the conditions of the funding agreement or other contractual arrangement are met;
- assessing performance and financial reports and undertaking follow up activity as necessary;
- making payments as specified in the funding agreement or contractual arrangement;
- providing feedback to funded organisations during the funding period and following the conclusion of activities; and
- approving fund holder proposals / service delivery plans.

Approver

The Approver for the programme is the Assistant Secretary of the Rural Remote & Indigenous Access Branch. The Approver considers whether the proposal will make an efficient, effective, ethical and economical use of Australian Government resources, as required by Commonwealth legislation, and whether any specific requirements will need to be imposed as a condition of funding. Funding approval is at the discretion of the Approver.

Funding Recipients (Fund holders)

Organisations receiving funding allocations are responsible for the efficient and effective delivery of activities in accordance with the obligations contained in any funding agreement or contractual arrangement entered into under the programme. Organisations are also responsible for:

- ensuring that the terms and conditions of the funding agreement are met and that the activity is managed in a cost effective and efficient manner;
- ensuring the activity achieves value with relevant money;
- employing and managing staff required to deliver the activity;
- maintaining contact with the department and advising of any emerging issues that may impact on the success of the activity;
- identifying, documenting and managing risks and putting in place appropriate mitigation strategies;
- ensure outcomes and output reporting in accordance with the funding agreement; and
- participating in activity evaluation as necessary.

State and Territory Advisory Fora

The state / territory based Advisory Fora are committees established as advisory bodies for existing outreach service activities. Their role will be expanded to cover the programme as defined in the Visiting Optometrists Scheme Service Delivery Standards.

1.6. Risk Management

The department is committed to a comprehensive and systematic approach to the effective management of potential opportunities and adverse effects. Any contractual arrangement may be managed according to its level of risk to the Commonwealth. As such, applicants and funding recipients may be subject to a risk management assessment prior to the negotiation of any contractual arrangement and periodically thereafter.

Contractual arrangements will be managed proportional to their level of risk to the Commonwealth. As such, applicants and funding recipients may be subject to a risk management assessment prior to the negotiation of any contractual arrangement and periodically thereafter.

The inclusion of Supplementary Conditions, which could override and/or amend and/or impose additional terms to the Standard Funding Agreement, may be included for organisations with a risk rating of medium or above.

Consistent with the responsibilities described under Section 1.5, funding recipients are responsible for managing risks to their own business activities and priorities. The Commonwealth manages risks to programme funds and outcomes through its management of the grant.

1.7.   Programme Timeframes

These Programme Guidelines will be publically available and will form part of the approach to market documentation for any funding process.

Following assessment of applications and final decisions, there will be a minimum three month transition period for those organisations whose funding is discontinued as a result of the assessment process.

Table 2: Key dates for the programme

Event	Date
Invitation to apply is open for applicants	December 2014
Applications close	January 2015
Assessment of applications finalised and Assessment Report provided to Approver	Approximately two weeks after applications close
Execution of funding agreements and unsuccessful applicants notified	Approximately four weeks after ITA closes

The first payment of funding to the successful Applicants will occur in accordance with the executed funding agreement.

2.   *Eligibility*

2.1.   What entities are eligible to apply for funding?

Applications for funding under the programme are limited to those organisations managing the Rural Health Outreach Fund.

2.2.   What is eligible for funding?

Funding under the programme can be used for the administration and service delivery activities undertaken by fund holders to manage and coordinate the rural and remote delivery of optometry services in line with the Visiting Optometrists Scheme Service Delivery Standards.

2.3.   What is not eligible for funding?

The Visiting Optometrists Scheme Service Delivery Standards outline remuneration costs associated with many aspects of engaging optometrists to deliver rural and remote optometry services. The following will not be covered by the programme:

- the purchase of equipment for use by optometrists on outreach visits. However, consideration will be given to assisting with lease of equipment required for use during outreach visits; and
- funding of administrative support staff during the time the visiting health professional provides up skilling to local health professionals. However, optometrists may be eligible to receive funding for staff providing administrative support associated with the delivery of activities under the programme,

such as the organisation of appointments, processing of correspondence and follow up with patients at the outreach location.
- capital works, such as the purchase of any land, the purchase or construction of a completely new premises, the demolition (whether or not followed by the replacement) of the majority of an existing premises or works including minor capital works;
- the purchase or repair of equipment or motor vehicles;
- funding of general service delivery;
- retrospective items/activities;
- activities undertaken by political organisations;
- activities which subsidise commercial activities; and
- clinical trials.

3.   Probity

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring that the process for providing funding under the programme is transparent and in accordance with published Guidelines.

> Note: Guidelines may be varied from time-to-time by the Australian Government as the needs of the programme dictate. Amended Guidelines will be published on the department's website.

3.1.   Conflict of interest

A conflict of interest may exist if departmental staff, any member of an advisory panel or expert committee, and/or the applicant or any of its personnel:

- Has a relationship (whether professional, commercial or personal) with a party who is able to influence the application assessment process, such as a departmental officer;
- Has a relationship with, or interest in, an organisation, which is likely to interfere with or restrict the applicants in carrying out the proposed activities fairly and independently; or
- Has a relationship with, or interest in, an organisation from which they will receive personal gain as a result of the granting of funding under the programme.

Each party will be required to declare as part of their application, existing conflicts of interest or that to the best of their knowledge there is no conflict of interest, including in relation to the examples above, that would impact on or prevent the applicant from proceeding with the activity or any funding agreement it may enter into with the Australian Government.

Where a party subsequently identifies that an actual, apparent, or potential conflict of interest exists or might arise in relation to this application for funding, external parties must inform the department in writing immediately. Departmental staff or members of any advisory panel or expert committee must advise the chair of the assessment panel. Conflicts of interest for departmental staff will be handled in compliance with the Australian Public Service Commission policies and procedures.

3.2.   Privacy - Confidentiality and Protection of Personal Information

Each applicant will be required to declare as part of their application, their ability to comply with the following Legislation/Clauses from the funding agreement they may enter into with the Australian Government.

The Protection of Personal Information Clause requires the funding recipient to:

- comply with the *Privacy Act (1988) (*'the Privacy Act'*),* including the 13 Australian Privacy Principles (APPs) which are contained in Schedule 1 of the Privacy Act;
- impose the same privacy obligations on any subcontractors it engages to assist with the activity.

The Confidentiality Clause imposes obligations on the funding recipient with respect to special categories of information collected, created or held under the funding agreement. The funding recipient is required to seek the department's consent in writing before disclosing confidential information.

Further information can be found in the terms & conditions of the funding agreement available on the [department's website](#).

4. Application Process

4.1. Type of Application Process

Eligible organisations are able to apply for funding through targeted grant rounds. All proposals for funding will be assessed against the assessment criteria outlined in section 3 of the Visiting Optometrist Scheme Application Form. Section 1.7, Programme Timeframes, outlines the expected timelines for grant rounds under this programme.

Targeted grant rounds

Funding through targeted non-competitive funding rounds will open and close on nominated dates. These grant rounds will be open to a small number of potential funding recipients based on the specialised requirements of the initiative or activity under consideration.

Procurement

Funds may also be used for the procurement of work directly related to the purpose of the programme. Such procurements will be undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Commonwealth Procurement Rules and will be for purposes that are consistent with the objectives and priorities of the programme.

4.2. Obtaining an application pack

The Approach to Market documentation consists of these Programme Guidelines, the Visiting Optometrists Scheme Service Delivery Standards and an Application Form. These documents will be provided to eligible applicants by the department on the day that the funding round opens.

4.3. Application requirements

Applications should be submitted to the department by the date specified in the Application Form and should meet all the requirements outlined below.

Applications should address all of the relevant criteria to be considered for funding. These criteria are outlined in the Application Form. It is important to complete each section of the application form and use the checklist in the Application Form to make sure each requirement has been considered.

4.4. How to submit an application

Applications must be submitted on the official Application Form in accordance with the requirements outlined in the Application Form.

5. Selection Process

5.1. Assessment process

An assessment committee will be established by the department to assess applications against the selection criteria and select the shortlisted applicants. Any non-APS members or independent advisers invited to provide 'expert' advice to the Assessment Committee will be treated as agency staff as per Part 1, section 2.8 of the CGRGs.

The selection process is undertaken in two stages.

Stage 1 – Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility Criteria are identified in the Application Form. Each applicant should satisfy all Eligibility Criteria in order to be considered for further assessment. This will be determined by the Assessment Committee. For targeted non-competitive funding rounds, the department may request additional information from applicants about their applications, in the event that they do not meet the Eligibility Criteria, but is not obliged to do so.

Stage 2 – Assessment Criteria

Only applications that satisfy all Eligibility Criteria (if any) will proceed to Stage 2. These applications will be assessed against the Assessment Criteria in the Application Form by the Assessment Committee.

Applications will then be assessed to ensure value with relevant money is achieved in line with the objectives of the programme.

To assist with the assessment of an application, clarifying information may be requested by the department. For targeted non-competitive funding rounds, the department may also request additional information from applicants about their applications, but is not obliged to do so. Applicants will be notified by email or post where this is required.

Table 3: Assessment Rating Scale

Rating (for individual criterion)	Rank
High quality – response to this criterion addresses all or most sub-criteria to a higher than average standard. Additional evidence* is available and confirms good performance against this criterion.	Highly Suitable
Good quality – response against this criterion meets most sub-criteria to an average and acceptable level. Some additional evidence* is available and provides some support for claims against this criterion.	Suitable
Poor quality – poor claims against this criterion; meets some or none of the sub-criteria. Additional evidence* is unavailable, not relevant or lacking in detail.	Not Suitable

*Additional evidence may include attachments to the application or additional information, where requested by the department.

Policy Priority

The assessment against the Assessment Criteria will be used to identify those applicants with the capability to best meet the policy priorities of the programme.

Value with Relevant Money

All applications will be assessed to ensure that they deliver value with relevant money and include such considerations as:

- the alignment of the application with the objective and outcomes of the programme;
- the applicants' capacity to fulfil the programme requirements;
- past performance in undertaking similar funding agreements;
- whole of activity costs in relation to the deliverables and their contribution to achieving programme outcomes; and
- the degree to which identified risk associated with the activity is managed effectively.

Other factors

In assessing an application, the Assessment Committee may consider the applicant's financial viability and the risk of the application, and may use material included in response to one criterion in the assessment of other criteria.

The Assessment Committee may seek information about any applicant from any other source, including from within the Commonwealth, whether or not the individuals or organisations contacted are nominated as referees by the applicant.

The Assessment Committee may also consider information about the applicant that is available through the normal course of the department's business.

If the assessment process identifies unintentional errors of form in an application, the applicant may be contacted to correct or clarify the errors, but they will not be permitted to make any material alteration or addition.

6.   Decision Making

6.1.   Approval of funding

Following an assessment of the applications by the assessment committee, advice will be provided by the committee chair to the Approver on the merits of the application/s.

The Approver will consider whether the proposal will make an efficient, effective, ethical and economical use of Commonwealth resources, as required by Commonwealth Legislation, and whether any specific requirements will need to be imposed as a condition of funding.

Funding approval is at the discretion of the Approver.

6.2.   Advice to Applicants

Applicants will be advised in writing of the outcome of their application. Advice to successful applicants will contain details of any specific conditions attached to the funding. Funding approvals will also be listed on the department's website.

The department will notify all unsuccessful applicants, in writing, after execution of agreement/s.

6.3.   Complaint handling

The department's Procurement and Funding Complaints Handling Policy applies to complaints that arise in relation to a procurement or funding process. It covers events that occur between the time the request documentation is released publicly and the date of contract execution, regardless of when the actual complaint is made.

The department requires that all complaints relating to a procurement or funding process must be lodged in writing. Further details of the policy are available on the 'About Us' page on the department's internet site.

Any enquiries relating to funding decisions for this programme should be directed to Grant.ATM@health.gov.au.

7.   *Governance and Accountability*

7.1.   Contracting arrangements

Successful applicants will be required to enter into a funding agreement with the Commonwealth (represented by the department). Approach to market (ATM) documentation will include the terms and conditions of the Standard Funding Agreement, which are also available on the department's website. These cannot be changed, but additional supplementary conditions may apply. The department will negotiate with successful applicants with the aim of having funding agreements signed within timeframe indicated in section 1.7 of these Programme Guidelines. Organisations should not make financial commitments in expectation of receiving funding until a funding agreement has been executed.

Funded organisations must carry out each activity in accordance with the funding agreement, which will include meeting milestones and other timeframes specified in the schedule for that activity. This will also outline the record keeping, reporting and acquittal requirements that will apply to successful applicants.

7.2.   Specific conditions

There may be specific conditions attached to the funding approval required as a result of the assessment process or the risk rating of an organisation or imposed by the Approver. These will be identified in the offer of funding or during funding agreement negotiations.

7.3.   Payment arrangements

Payments will be made in accordance with the funding agreement.

The default invoice process for the department is Recipient Created Tax Invoices (RCTI).

7.4.   Reporting requirements

Funded organisations must provide the department with the reports for an activity containing the information, and at the times and in the manner specified in the funding agreement. Specific reporting requirements will be similar to those of the RHOF. This will form part of the funded organisation's agreement with the department and will include a minimum of six monthly performance reporting. Fund holders will be required to:

- provide progress reports on the agreed milestones. These progress reports may include funding acquittal requirements and program data. The timing of progress reports will be negotiated and form part of the final contractual arrangement;

- collect and collate statistical service data and financial information about the service and provide data and financial reports to the department on request. The department will give a reasonable timeframe in which to respond to any requests for such information; and

- provide a Service Delivery Plan for the period of the funding agreement that has been endorsed by the Advisory Forum. The Service Delivery Plan must contain advice as outlined in Section 10 of the Service Delivery Standards.

7.5.   Monitoring

The funding recipient will be required to actively manage the delivery of the activity under the programme. The department will monitor progress in accordance with the funding agreement.

7.6.   Evaluation

An evaluation by the department will determine how the funded activity contributed to the objectives of the programme. Funding recipients will be required to provide information to assist in this evaluation for a period of time, as stipulated in the funding agreement, after funding has been provided.

A post-implementation evaluation of the operation of, and activities supported by, the VOS will determine how the funding contributed to the objectives of the VOS. The fund holders may be required to provide information and data on funded services to assist in this evaluation as outlined in the funding agreement. This would include information such as:

1) How outreach services have been delivered;
   a) Details of each circuit - where the services have been provided, number of times per year the circuit will be undertaken;
   b) Number of patients seen in each location per visit - indigenous and non-indigenous;
   c) Cost of providing the service in each location;
   d) How was the need identified for each location/circuit;
2) Did services meet the need; and
3) What gaps were identified during the needs analysis and were these needs met.

7.7.   Branding

All publications related to the programme should acknowledge the department as follows – "Visiting Optometrists Scheme – an Australian Government Initiative".

7.8.   Insurance

You will be required to take out and maintain, for the period specified in the funding agreement, all types and amounts of insurance necessary to cover the obligations of the organisation in relation to the activity.

Where the department deems appropriate, additional insurance requirements may be specified in the funding agreement.

7.9.   Taxation Implications

Applicants are responsible for ensuring compliance with appropriate taxation legislative requirements.

For general guidance on the taxation treatment of grants and funding from the Commonwealth, applicants should refer to the Australian Tax Office website (www.ato.gov.au). However, applicants are advised to seek independent advice from a taxation professional on how funding provided under this Programme would be treated for tax purposes.

8. Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Advisory Forum	State/Territory based committee that provides advice to the fund holder on how best to deploy resources, determine priorities in project plans, and the suitability of services being proposed for funding under the programme.
Approver	The Approver is the Assistant Secretary of the Rural Remote & Indigenous Access Branch.
The department	The Australian Government Department of Health.
Fund Holder	Fund holders are those organisations contracted by the department under the programme to manage outreach optometry services for people in regional, rural and remote locations within a specified state or territory jurisdiction.
Grant Programme Guidelines	Grant Programme Guidelines means this document.
Health professional	A general term for a person with tertiary qualifications in a health related field.
Need	Need includes consideration of issues such as the burden of disease, level of disadvantage, services currently available locally, linkages and integration with other services and effect on local planning and initiatives.
Outreach service	Where a health professional provides services in a location that is not the location of their principal practice.
Participating Optometrists	A Participating Optometrist is one who has signed an agreement known as the Common Form of Undertaking – Participating Optometrists - arrangements with the Commonwealth Government.
The programme	The programme is the Visiting Optometrists Scheme.
Risk management	Risk management is the set of activities concerned with identifying potential risks, analysing their likelihood and consequence(s), and developing and implementing treatments to reduce or remove the risk. Risk management facilitates the achievement of business objectives by maximising opportunities and limiting or avoiding losses.
Value with relevant money	Value with relevant money is a key principle which underpins all funding decisions. Value with relevant money must be demonstrated under the *PGPA Act 2013.* The principle of value with relevant money is also outlined in detail in Section 11 of the Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines.