

Policy Statement

Linked Community Services Limited will comply with funding body requirements, guidelines and relevant legislation that defines how service users contribute to the cost of transport services.

LINKED will balance the operational costs of delivering services against what is considered reasonable and affordable for services users to contribute, to ensure our services are accessible to a diverse range of people – including those experiencing financial hardship.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to document LINKED's approach to implementing and maintaining a transparent, consistent, and sustainable fees model that:

- meets the requirements for each funding body, grant, and/or contract,
- considers the ability of individuals to contribute financially based on their individual circumstances, and,
- outlines our approach to implement safeguards or fee adjustments that alleviate or remove barriers for those who are financially disadvantaged that wish to access our services.

Scope

This policy applies to all LINKED employees who are responsible for setting and reviewing fees, determining eligibility for service, and making decisions on hardship provision cases. LINKED provides transport service via multiple funding streams, and this policy provides a streamlined approach to service user contributions, regardless of funding source.

Staff will be guided by LINKED's Service User Contribution Procedure in considering fee/contribution reductions.

The following procedural statements outline our approach to each funded service.

Procedure Statement

The Department of Health and Aged Care provides the National Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) that guides CHSP providers on implementing client contribution arrangements. Transport for NSW also provides guidance for service user contributions within its Community Transport Service Contract Standard Terms and Conditions documentation. LINKED adheres to these guidelines when defining its approach to the charging, collecting and reporting of client contributions.

All service users who can afford to contribute to the cost of their service should do so. However, guidelines acknowledge that there is no "one size fits all" approach to setting client contributions. Therefore providers, such as LINKED, can flexibly implement the framework to best meet our service user and operational needs based on the context in which the service is delivered. This is why fees and/or contributions may vary between geographical areas, or between service users, once elements such as socio-economic climate, distance, demand etc are taken into consideration.

LINKED's Responsibilities

- Service users will be informed of our Service User Contribution Policy during the onboarding process, and the information will be publicly available via LINKED's website.
- Information will be provided in an accessible format and fees will be determined in a way that is transparent, accessible, and fair.
- LINKED will not charge fees that exceed the actual cost of service provision and in assessing, setting, and charging fees, LINKED will always respect the rights of service users.
- At any time, information regarding the fees structure will be provided upon request to the service user and/or their advocates. This includes a review of fees on request and where there are changes to the financial circumstances of the client.
- A variety of payment methods will be offered to help accommodate our client's abilities and preferences.
- Service will not be denied because of an inability to pay fees and in this situation a reduced fee may be negotiated and documented.

- All client fee contributions will be reported in accordance with the relevant funding agreement.
- Service user contribution rates will be reviewed annually and revenue from these contributions will be used to support ongoing service delivery and where possible expand the services we are currently funded to deliver.

Service User Responsibilities

- All service users are expected to pay a contribution to the cost of their services and must provide enough information for LINKED to determine an appropriate level of fee based on their individual circumstances.
- Service users have the responsibility to pay fees promptly and will be encouraged to contact staff at any time if they experience difficulties with meeting the costs of services.
- Service users will be given at least one month's notice of any changes to the Fees Schedule, and in turn, service users are required to provide LINKED with 24 hours' notice for service cancellation, otherwise a percentage of the full fee may be charged. (Refer to LINKED's Cancellation Policy for more information.)
- People receiving services and/or their advocates have the right to utilise LINKED's complaints process to appeal against a given fee/contribution arrangement if agreement cannot be reached prior.

Fares Schedule

Fees charged for transport services provided by LINKED are set in accordance with this policy and are revised annually at a minimum. Current fees are shown in the fares schedule available on the website.

The full cost of service will be charged if clients are receiving or have received compensation payments intended to cover the cost of community services. Circumstances where full costs apply are determined on a case-by-case basis and may include instances such as:

- Where the service is purchased as part of a package provided by another aged care or disability service provider (brokered service).
- Where compensation payments apply.
- Where the client chooses services that are not subsidised.
- Where there is no eligibility for a subsidised service and the client chooses to pay a full fee for service directly.

Fee Reduction

LINKED recognises that some service users have a limited capacity to pay for support due to financial hardship; however, the payment of a fee-for-service by service users who have capacity to pay is endorsed. People who are assessed as needing support are eligible to receive support, regardless of their capacity to pay.

Service users who are undergoing hardship may request to negotiate the fee/contribution. Where a service user is considered to be undergoing hardship, they may be asked to pay a minimum contribution for a designated period determined by the service. Any variation or reduction in fees will be documented the financial assistance form and client file in our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software.

Considerations when considering a claim for hardship may include:

- The service user's income and/or financial means available to them.
- The clients' general household circumstances (whether they live alone, are part of a couple or family living together, live in a household of unrelated people or are in some other circumstance).
- Any exceptional and unavoidable expenses the service user may have, such as high pharmaceutical expenses.

Information obtained about a service user's income is treated as private and confidential. The service user needs to be notified that any significant changes to their circumstances which may alter their status in relation to hardship provisions will need to be advised to Linked within 30 days.

Compliance Responsibility

CEO:

Endorse and ensure compliance with the Service User Contribution Policy.

Leadership team:

Support staff competence and compliance with this policy and ensure staff receive appropriate training, supervision and debriefing to comply with this policy.

Other Employees:

Comply with the Service User Contribution Policy, and escalate any matters of concern via their line manager.

Related Documents, Policy & Legislation

- Commonwealth Home Support Programme Manual Current and Up to Date
- Appendix F – Guide to the National Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) Client Contribution Framework
- National Guide to the CHSP Client Contribution Framework
- Transport for NSW Community Transport Service Contract Standard Terms and Conditions
- Transport Fares Schedule
- Client Handbook
- Financial Assistance Form
- Service User Contribution Procedure
- Cancellation Policy
- Aged Care Quality Standards