

LINKAGES

The Home and Community Care (HACC) Program

The Linkages Program is a service provided through the Home and Community Care (HACC) Program. HACC is funded jointly by the Commonwealth and State governments under the *Home and Community Care Act 1985*, and is also governed by the provisions of the *Amending Agreement in relation to the provision of financial assistance by Commonwealth of Australia to State of Victoria Home and Community Care HACC Program 1998*.

The HACC Program provides basic maintenance and support services for frail older people, younger people with moderate to severe disabilities, and the carers of those people. It aims to support people at home and to prevent premature or inappropriate admission to residential care.

The following summary of Linkages is for general information only, the official policy is contained in the Linkages section of the Victorian HACC Program Manual.

What is Linkages?

The aim of Linkages is to support people with complex care needs to live independently in the community by providing individually tailored packages of care.

Linkages providers receive “brokerage” funds through the HACC Program to cover the costs of case management, and to purchase a flexible package of services designed to meet the specific needs of each individual client within available resources.

Case management, which offers a more intensive level of monitoring and care planning, involves five core tasks:

- Screening for eligibility
- Assessment of needs
- Care planning and service coordination
- Monitoring and service adjustment
- Case closure

Case management can also provide an advocacy and support role for the individual client.

Who can use Linkages?

Linkages is for people who are eligible for HACC services and who wish to remain living at home or in the community, and who may:

- have a range of interacting physical/medical, social and emotional needs and consequently require assistance to organise and coordinate community care services
- have needs which are subject to rapid change, requiring frequent monitoring
- find it difficult to get services through the normal HACC Program which are sufficiently flexible to meet their complex care needs
- need to integrate formal services and informal support networks
- have a need for support, advocacy and monitoring

- as carers, have their quality of life significantly compromised by their caring role and who request assistance with that role
- have special needs not met by available services due to ethnic or aboriginal background, or geographic isolation

How much does Linkages Cost?

The costs of a Linkages package will vary with the services provided for each service user, within the resources available. Fees charged by Linkages services must be negotiated with the person seeking to use the service, be affordable and take into account the total cost of fees for all services provided as part of their case plan and other associated costs of care. Service users should receive a single bill for all services provided.

All fees are set in accordance with the Victorian HACC Program Fees Policy. No one is refused a service because of genuine inability to pay fees.

How can I get a Linkages Package?

To obtain a Linkages package, you must first be assessed as eligible to receive HACC services and as having more complex care needs that could be appropriately met by a case management service. A range of HACC providers including local governments, community health centres, or other community organisations may do this assessment.

If you approach a Linkages service directly, they will perform the assessment.

It is not necessary to be assessed by an Aged Care Assessment Service to obtain a Linkages package.

Who Provides Linkages?

Linkages services are provided by a range of organisations funded by the HACC Program to deliver a high quality of care. There is at least one Linkages service in each of the Department of Human Services four metropolitan and five rural regions across the State. Service providers funded by the HACC Program are part of the wider care network in which an organisation's service may be one of several services a person receives.

(See list of providers at end of this document).

What if I have a complaint about Linkages?

All HACC services, including Linkages, must comply with the HACC Statement of Rights and Responsibilities and the HACC Complaints Policy.

The HACC Statement of Rights and Responsibilities includes the right to pursue any complaint about service provision without retribution.

Every HACC service provider is required to have a documented complaints mechanism in place with clear guidelines and procedures, which responds promptly and fairly to any complaint.

Complaints mechanisms must also allow for participation by an advocate on behalf of the service user.

Complaints, which cannot be resolved at the agency level, or are raised by service users who feel they are unable to approach the agency directly, may be referred to the Department of Human Service regional office responsible for monitoring service quality. Other independent options for complaints investigation include:

- Health Services Commissioner
- State Government Ombudsman
- Equal Opportunity Commission
- Office of the Public Advocate
- Guardianship and Administration Board
- Regulatory Industry Boards