

Community Connect

Guidance material

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Introduction

The State Insurance Regulatory Authority (SIRA)'s Community Connect is designed to help workers as they adjust to changing circumstances because their weekly workers compensation payments will be ceasing or have ceased due to the operation of section 39 of the *Workers Compensation Act 1987* (1987 Act).

Community Connect provides workers with up to \$1,000 in funding for an item or service to help manage any barriers or needs that are preventing them from adjusting to these changed circumstances.

Under workers compensation legislation, weekly payments are available for a maximum (aggregate) period of 260 weeks (five years). This applies unless the worker has been assessed as having a permanent impairment of more than 20 per cent.

Community Connect can be used more than once provided total costs do not exceed \$1,000 per worker.

Section 53 of the *Workplace Injury Management and Workers Compensation Act 1998* (1998 Act) allows SIRA to develop, administer and coordinate vocational rehabilitation schemes for workers.

The SIRA [help and support services](#) webpage provides information regarding support services for workers.

Eligibility

A worker is eligible to access Community Connect if they have been notified by their insurer that they will cease to receive weekly compensation payments on a specific date prior to June 2018, due to section 39 of the 1987 Act.

Principles

A request for Community Connect should meet the following principles:

1. the service or item supports a worker to help manage barriers or needs impacting them as a result of ceasing entitlement to weekly payments
and/or
2. the service or item aims to support a worker to access a suitable community support service.

The service or item should not be reasonably necessary medical or related treatment.

A worker is entitled to medical treatment and workplace rehabilitation under section 60 of the 1987 Act for either two or five years after cessation of weekly payments depending on the assessed level of permanent impairment.

Using Community Connect

Community Connect provides flexible funding with consideration of each worker's unique circumstances.

Participation is voluntary and the worker can withdraw from a service at any time. A worker can recommence Community Connect if they meet the requirements.

Community Connect must be fully completed within two years, following the cessation of entitlement to weekly payments.

The following examples demonstrate how the funding could be used to help a worker implement strategies to address short term barriers or needs that are preventing them from adjusting to changed circumstances.

Please be aware, the examples below are not exhaustive and serve as a guide only.

Financial counselling

Community Connect may be used for financial counselling or similar services if there is a reason a worker cannot access free, community-funded services.

Example

Kate requests professional help to plan a budget given her weekly income will change.

Kate contacted a community organisation that offers financial counselling and was advised there was a four-week waiting list for free, face-to-face financial counselling and budgeting assistance.

Kate discusses her needs with her insurer and it is agreed that she would benefit from face-to-face assistance as soon as possible. A Community Connect payment allows Kate to access financial advice immediately.

Transitional child care

Community Connect can be used to help with the costs of short-term child care where these expenses are a barrier to participating in SIRA funded or community vocational training programs, workplace rehabilitation or community services.

Example

Jack has not returned to work since his injury. He is the primary carer for his children so that his wife can work.

Jack's insurer has approved his participation in vocational training, but he needs help with casual child care costs while he is participating in training.

Community Connect may be used to fund out-of-pocket fees and the bond for his registered child care provider.

Travel

Community Connect can be used to pay for travel costs incurred when a worker is participating in a community program.

Workers should use public transport where available and appropriate. If it is necessary to use a private vehicle, the vehicle must have third-party property insurance¹ as a minimum.

Private transport costs are reimbursed at 55 cents per kilometre². Up to \$300 may be paid in advance where appropriate, with a minimum of 10 days' notice.

Please note, transport costs that are associated with worker entitlements or other vocational programs should be funded under the appropriate program.

Example

Karim wants to attend a community support group that will help improve his self-management and organisational capabilities with the aim of starting to look for work.

Karim requests Community Connect assistance from his insurer and is provided with funds to pay bus fares to and from the community centre for four weeks.

Planning and support

Community Connect may be used to pay for a support service to help a worker to connect with community services.

Example

¹ Third party property insurance is different to third party personal (CTP 'green slip') insurance, which does not meet the minimum insurance requirement.

² These rates are correct at time of publication. Please refer to the current Workers compensation benefits guide for the current rate for car travel expenses.

Anh has expressed difficulty in understanding how to access social and community services to support him once his payments cease.

Anh approached the insurer to assist him to select an appropriate service provider with experience helping people access community services.

The provider was engaged to support Anh with his application for Centrelink payments and put him in touch with a social support group.

Example

Hannah would like to try volunteering in her local community however she doesn't know where to start.

Hannah's insurer referred her to a community organisation for assistance. The community organisation helped Hannah identify her interests, skills and goals and provided information about volunteering.

With this support, Hannah started volunteer work and was able to build up her confidence and connect with people in a comfortable environment.

Planning and support may include:

- helping a worker identify issues and needs they wish to address
- identifying a worker's strengths and support systems to help them manage issues
- planning and setting personal goals
- identifying and providing information
- helping a worker to access appropriate services including specialist disability, mainstream or community services.

Support should be provided on a one-on-one basis to ensure that the service is personalised and provides a worker with intervention(s) appropriate to their needs.

Who can provide planning and support services?

Organisations that have a quality management system and can provide evidence that they conform to the [NSW Disability Service Standards](#) can deliver planning and support services.

Organisations:

- may offer face-to-face contact, website or telephone services depending on the specific issue and needs of a worker including the worker's location
- should not be providing treatment or return to work services to the worker.

The worker or the insurer should identify the most appropriate service provider to support the worker's needs and goals.

The provider organisation should ensure that the person providing services to the worker has the appropriate skills, knowledge and experience to achieve the best possible outcome(s) for the worker.

Insurer notification

Either the worker, insurer or SIRA support and information service can identify that Community Connect could be of benefit to the worker. The worker is not required to complete an application form to access Community Connect funding.

The worker or SIRA support and information service should discuss how they want to use the funding with the insurer and advise the insurer of the supplier or service provider's details and costs. The insurer will provide advice on whether the proposed item or service meets the principles of Community Connect and approve payment.

Community Connect funding must be discussed with the insurer before costs are incurred.

The SIRA support and information service can connect workers to community support providers and services offered by [HSNet](#) and [Ability Links NSW](#). If funding is required the worker will need to contact the insurer to access Community Connect.

Payment

The insurer managing the claim is responsible for administering payments and re-imbursments.

Where funding is obtained through a service provider, a tax invoice must be provided to the insurer. In cases where the worker is seeking re-imbusement for travel costs to participate in a community program, the worker must supply receipts to the insurer.

Payments for Community Connect funding must be recorded using the payment code VCC001.

Reimbursement from SIRA

When the claim is with a self-insurer or specialised insurer and the insurer is seeking reimbursement for expenses, the insurer should submit a [vocational program claim for payment](#) and relevant receipts to SIRA within six months from the date the expenses were incurred.

Monitoring

The insurer is responsible for ensuring Community Connect is used effectively to address a worker's barriers or needs. The insurer should also make sure that the services provided helped a worker to access community funded program(s) if they require support beyond Community Connect.

Change in circumstances

If an extension or amendment to Community Connect is required, this request should be made to the insurer.

What to do if there is an issue

If there is disagreement about the use of Community Connect prior to submission of a request, the worker should try to resolve the matter directly with the insurer in the first instance. If the problem cannot be resolved, contact SIRA support and information service on 13 10 50 or email transitionsupport@sira.nsw.gov.au.

Further information

Learn more about SIRA, workers compensation, Community Connect and our vocational programs at our website. Get started by checking out the links below:

- [Are you approaching five years of weekly workers compensation payments?](#)
- [Help and support services](#)
- [Medical, hospital and rehabilitation expenses](#)
- [New employment assistance.](#)

SIRA vocational programs

If you are interested in one of our vocational programs, the links below will help you take the next steps:

- [Work trial](#)
- [Training program](#)
- [Equipment and workplace modifications](#)
- [Transition to work](#)
- [JobCover placement program.](#)

Legislation and detailed guidelines

If you'd like further information, please read the related NSW legislation and detailed guidelines for claiming workers compensation:

- Vocational rehabilitation programs - [*Workplace Injury Management and Workers Compensation Act 1998, section 53*](#)
- New employment assistance - [*Workers Compensation Act 1987, section 64B*](#)
- Return to work assistance - [*Workers Compensation Regulation 2016, Part 5*](#)
- [*Guidelines for claiming workers compensation.*](#)

The SIRA vocational programs and return to work assistance benefit operate in addition to and separately from Community Connect. Contact the SIRA Customer Service Centre on 13 10 50 or email contact@sira.nsw.gov.au if you have any questions or require assistance.

Disclaimer

This publication may contain information that relates to the regulation of workers compensation insurance, motor accident third party (CTP) insurance and home building compensation in NSW. It may include details of some of your obligations under the various schemes that the State Insurance Regulatory Authority (SIRA) administers.

However to ensure you comply with your legal obligations you must refer to the appropriate legislation as currently in force. Up to date legislation can be found at the NSW Legislation website legislation.nsw.gov.au

This publication does not represent a comprehensive statement of the law as it applies to particular problems or to individuals, or as a substitute for legal advice. You should seek independent legal advice if you need assistance on the application of the law to your situation.

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