

Speech Pathology and Occupational Therapy student grant program guidelines

October 2024

OFFICIAL

Contents

Background	2
Funding purpose	2
Program overview	2
1.0 Program dates	3
2.0 Eligibility	3
Residency	3
Employment	4
Education	5
3.0 Ineligible applicants	6
4.0 How to apply	6
5.0 Assessment of eligibility and claims	7
6.0 Privacy statement	8
7.0 Terms and conditions	9
8.0 Other information	9
9.0 Contact us	10
Appendix 1: Definitions	11
Appendix 2: Border communities	12

Background

Victoria's healthcare workforce faces long-standing pressures that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Amid increased demand for care, ongoing action is needed to address issues regarding the supply and distribution of the healthcare workforce. The Victorian Government is implementing a range of initiatives to support Victoria's healthcare workforce including increased support for regional and rural areas.

Speech pathologists and occupational therapists are two important professions that assist those living with a disability. In 2020, only a quarter of these workforces were based in regional and rural areas. As a result, workforce shortages since the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted regional and rural healthcare significantly.

Funding purpose

The Department of Health (the department) is awarding grants to incentivise final year students in speech pathology and occupational therapy to practise in regional and rural Victoria (including Victorian cross border communities).

The grants aim to:

- Grow the number of speech pathologists and occupational therapists working in regional and rural Victoria, in public or private health and educational settings.
- Support grant recipients to move, settle and integrate into rural and regional communities.
- Improve access to speech pathology and occupational therapy for those living in regional and rural areas.

From 2024 to 2026 inclusive, up to 436 grants of \$15,000 each are available upon course completion for domestic and international graduates working in regional and rural Victoria.

Program overview

The grants comprise a maximum of \$15,000 and will be delivered in two instalment payments paid six months apart. These include:

- The first instalment payment of \$7,500 to support costs associated with relocation and establishment in a regional or rural community.
- A second instalment payment of \$7,500 if still employed in regional or rural health or educational setting at the time of the second payment.

Applicants must apply in the program year that corresponds with their year of course completion. For example, applicants who complete, or are expected to complete, their course in 2024, must apply in Year 2.

This program is funded through the Victorian Government Department of Health and is administered on behalf the State of Victoria by its departments, including the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions and the Department of Government Services.

1.0 Program dates

Applicants must apply in the program year that corresponds with their year of course completion.

Year 1 (2023/24)	
24 November 2023	Program applications open (Year 1)
27 February 2024	Program applications close (Year 1)
May 2024	First instalment payment administered
September 2024	Application period for second payment
November 2024	Second instalment payment administered
Year 2 (2024/25)	
29 October 2024	Program applications open (Year 2)
25 February 2025	Program applications close (Year 2)
May 2025	First instalment payment administered
September 2025	Application period for second payment
November 2025	Second instalment payment administered
Year 3 (2025/26)	
28 October 2025	Program applications open (Year 3)
24 February 2026	Program applications close (Year 3)
May 2026	First instalment payment administered
September 2026	Application period for second payment
November 2026	Second instalment payment administered
December 2026	Program close

2.0 Eligibility

To be eligible for the grants under this Program in 2024, 2025 and 2026, applicants must meet the following requirements relating to:

- Residency;
- Employment; and
- Education.

2.1 Residency

Applicants must meet the residency requirements and/or hold valid working rights to work in Australia at the time of application and grant payments.

For the purposes of this grant, this is defined as:

- An Australian citizen

- A New Zealand citizen (or hold dual citizenship of either Australia or New Zealand)
- An Australian permanent resident
- Holder of an Australian permanent humanitarian visa, or
- Holder of another valid visa permitting the applicant to work in their chosen profession in Australia (in either speech pathology or occupational therapy).

2.2 Employment

Applicants must satisfy the following employment requirements:

Employment location

- Employment as a speech pathologist or occupational therapist in a Victorian regional or rural location (including cross border communities).
- The location must be in the 48 regional local government areas (LGAs) for more information see [Victoria's Regions on the Regional Victoria website](#).
- The list of eligible cross border communities is detailed in Appendix 2.

Professional registration

- For occupational therapists, maintain current professional registration throughout the grant payment period.

Employment start

- Commence employment by 31 March of the year the grant is delivered.
- For applications submitted in:
 - Year 1: Applicants must commence employment by 31 March 2024
 - Year 2: Applicants must commence employment by 31 March 2025
 - Year 3: Applicants must commence employment by 31 March 2026.

Employment hours

- Full time or part-time (minimum 0.4 fulltime equivalent hours).

Employment contract length

- The minimum contract length to be eligible for the first payment, is six months.
- The minimum contract length to be eligible for both payments is 12 months.
- Applicants providing a contract of less than 12 months will be required to provide further documentation to receive the second instalment payment.

Supporting documentation

- First instalment payment:
 - Provide copy of signed employment contract in their application.
 - The contract of employment should include the employer's name and location, employment address, contract type and full-time equivalent hours employed and Australian Business Number (ABN).
 - Provide attestation that employment will be commenced on the date specified in the employment contract and advise the Department of Government Services of any changes to this within 7 business days.

- Second instalment payment:
 - Provide a copy of a current payslip (either full time or part time at a minimum 0.4 full time equivalent hours). Please see Appendix 1 for the definition of 'current payslip'.
 - If there is a change of employer(s) or an employment contract of less than 12 months duration was provided at first instalment payment, the applicant must provide a copy of a signed employment contract of at least another six months at the second instalment payment.

Special circumstances

- Assessed on a case-by-case basis, at the Victorian Government's discretion, consideration may be given to grant applicants who are expected to start after the date specified on the employment contract or had to take a leave of absence from their course or employer, beyond the times specified above.
- The applicant will be responsible for providing satisfactory reasons and/or evidence to be considered a special case. In such cases, the decision of the Victorian Government on special circumstances will be final.

2.3 Education

Applicants must satisfy the following education requirements:

Education completion

- Applicants must successfully complete an approved program of study in either speech pathology or occupational therapy, and submit a copy of their official academic transcript, by the application closing date.
- Applicants must apply in the program year that corresponds with their year of course completion:
 - Applicants who complete or are expected to complete their program of study in 2023 must apply in Year 1.
 - Applicants who complete or are expected to complete their program of study in 2024 must apply in Year 2.
 - Applicants who complete or are expected to complete their program of study in 2025 must apply in Year 3.

Approved programs of study

- Undergraduate and post graduate accredited courses in occupational therapy or speech pathology including:
 - Bachelor of Occupational Therapy, Bachelor of Occupational Therapy (Honours), Master of Occupational Therapy, Bachelor of Health Science/Master of Occupational therapy, Bachelor of Applied Science with Master of Occupational Therapy Practice, Bachelor of Applied Science (Occupational Therapy), Doctor of Philosophy Occupational Therapy, Graduate Certificate in Occupational Therapy, Bachelor of Science (Occupational Therapy) (Honours), Master of Occupational Therapy Practice, Bachelor of Speech Pathology, Bachelor of Speech Pathology (Honours), Master of Speech Pathology, Bachelor of Applied Science (Speech Pathology), Master of Speech and Language Pathology, Bachelor of Health Science/Master of Speech and Language Therapy, Bachelor of Applied Science and Master of Speech Pathology, Bachelor of Speech and Language Sciences/Master of Speech Pathology, Bachelor of Science (Speech Pathology) (Honours), Master of Speech and Language Therapy, Master of Speech Pathology Studies.

Supporting information

- Domestic students are required to provide their unique student identifier and student number in their application to allow confirmation of course enrolment, to be eligible for grant payments. Please see 'How to apply' for further details.

3.0 Ineligible applicants

The following applicants are ineligible for this grant:

- Students who have completed an approved program of study in occupational therapy or speech pathology before 1 March 2023.
- Students who complete their final year of an approved program of study after 24 February 2026.
- Applicants who are not employed as a speech pathologist or occupational therapist in a regional or rural based health or educational setting in Victoria or its border communities as outlined.

4.0 How to apply

- Applicants must read these Program Guidelines and the Frequently Asked Questions before applying.
- Grants will be administered by the Victorian Department of Government Services.
- Applicants must apply online at www.vic.gov.au/speech-pathology-and-occupational-therapist-student-scholarship-program. Applications must be submitted by the Grant Program closure dates published on the program's website.
- Applicants must provide the following information and documentation in support of their application:
 - Name of educational institution and program of study.
 - Student ID number from applicant's educational institution.
 - Unique student identifier number.
 - Copy of official academic transcript showing course completion from applicant's educational institution.
 - Applicant must attest to having working rights for Australia.
 - Ahpra registration number (for occupational therapists only) if applicable.
 - Signed contract of employment that includes the employer's name, address and Australian Business Number (ABN), the applicant's name and full-time equivalent hours as well as the contract duration.
 - Australian bank account details for where the grant payments are to be made.
- Proof of identity: The applicant must be the person who applies for the grant and must provide on the application form, information from one of the following current 'proof of identity' documents:
 - Australian passport or New Zealand passport.
 - Medicare card.
 - Victorian driver licence or learner permit.
 - Foreign passport for those issued with an Australian visa.

If proof of identity is unable to be confirmed, the applicant will receive a follow-up email with instructions on how to provide their proof of identity details.

- To claim the second instalment payment, the applicant must provide the following information and documentation in support of their application:
 - Attest to meet the residency requirements to work in Australia.
 - Attest to have maintained Ahpra registration (for occupational therapists only).

- Current payslip (see definition of ‘current payslip’ in Appendix 1 for further details).
- Signed updated employment contract if required (see ‘Section 2.0 Eligibility’ for further details).
- Grant Agreement with the Victorian Government:
 - As part of the application process, the applicant must accept and agree to be bound by the terms and conditions of the Grant Program as stated in the application form and these guidelines. By submitting the application form, the applicant is making an offer to the Victorian Government and will be bound by the terms of the offer if accepted by the Victorian Government.
 - If successful, the applicant will be notified via email. This will form an agreement between the applicant and the Victorian Government on the terms contained in the application, these guidelines and the conditions of grant in the application form on delivery of the successful email notification.

5.0 Assessment of eligibility and claims

- The applicant will be required to confirm they meet the eligibility criteria at the time of application and again when claiming instalment payments. Eligibility must also be met when the application or claim is assessed by the Victorian Government.
- Applications and claims will be assessed using the information and evidence provided by the applicant. As part of this process, any information provided by an applicant may be shared and subject to verification by the applicant's employer, the Australian Government Department of Education and Department of Home Affairs, and Victorian Government departments including the Department of Health, Department of Government Services, Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions and any of the Victorian Public Health Services.
- The applicant may be requested to provide further information to assist in assessment of their application or claim. The Victorian Government reserves in its absolute discretion the right to refuse an application or claim where eligibility criteria are not met, or where the applicant does not or cannot provide sufficient information in the required timeframe to assess whether eligibility criteria have been met, or where a claim cannot be supported.

6.0 Privacy statement

- Information provided for this Program, that includes personal information, will be collected and used by the Victorian Government. The Department of Government Services (DGS) is a program administrator and collects personal information for the purpose of assessing eligibility, to compare eligibility with other Regional and Rural Allied Health Workforce incentives programs, and to administer claims and payments.
- By applying for a grant, applicants consent to the sharing of information as outlined in the Terms and Conditions. DGS as an administrator may contact applicants to clarify submitted information, and for program review, reporting, monitoring, audit and evaluation purposes.
- DGS will complete a range of eligibility assessments that may include data matching to clarify the accuracy and quality of information supplied by the applicant. The data matching may occur on enrolment information and personal information provided in the application, including supporting evidence and any claim or payment forms.
- For verification purposes, DGS will share the applicant's personal information with other agencies such as the Australian Government (Department of Education), State departments (Department of Health and its agencies) and Victorian Public Health Services. As part of the verification process, DGS may contact the

applicant's education provider to confirm enrolment and student status and/or the applicant's employer to validate the employment contract.

- If there is an intention to include personal information about a third party in the application, the applicant must ensure the third party is aware of and consents to the contents of this privacy statement.
- As an administering department, DGS collects demographic information for economic reporting purposes on behalf of the Victorian Government. No personal information is used in reporting; all reports are presented with aggregated data.
- Any personal information about the applicant or a third party will be collected, held, managed, used, disclosed or transferred and stored in accordance with the provisions of the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)* and other applicable laws.
- For enquiries about access to, or correction of, the applicant's personal information, contact spots@grants.vic.gov.au. Other concerns regarding the privacy of personal information and DGS's privacy policy can be emailed to privacy@dgs.vic.gov.au.

7.0 Terms and conditions

- As part of the application process, applicants must accept and agree to be bound by the terms and conditions of the Program as stated in the application form and these guidelines. By completing the application form, applicants are making an offer to the Victorian Government and will be bound by the terms of the offer if accepted by the Victorian Government.
- To receive both instalment payments, applicants must maintain eligibility for the entire grant period.
- If successful, the applicant may spend the grant amount on any item or activity that supports them to relocate, integrate and practice in regional or rural Victoria. We recommend considering allocating amounts to:
 - Travel expenses for work, professional development, or social activities.
 - Housing or accommodation.
 - Technology or equipment that supports practise.
 - Professional development or mentoring services through the applicant's workplace or professional association. More information is available at otaus.com.au and www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au.
- If successful, applicants are responsible for maintaining professional registration (occupational therapy only) for the grant period and informing the administrator if they are unable to meet eligibility requirements due to incomplete or restricted professional registration.
- The department is not required to withhold tax (PAYG) from grants paid. The department strongly recommends that applicants seek independent tax advice regarding their grant payment and any impact it may have on their tax liability, or any benefits paid under an Australian Government scheme.
 - Applicants should be aware that they may be liable to pay tax on their grant. For more information, see the calculator on the [Australian Taxation Office website](#).
 - They may be entitled to claim a tax deduction for self-education expenses. For more information, see the [Australian Taxation Office website](#).
- The provision of incorrect bank details means that payment may not be received, and the department will be under no obligation to make any repayment.
- All grant payments must be claimed by 30 September 2026. No further payments will be made for claims received after this point.
- It is the applicant's responsibility to inform the Department of Government Services if they are no longer employed in a regional or rural location or have not met professional registration requirements (if

applicable). If the applicant does not complete the initial six months in a regional or rural health or educational setting (for example, withdraws from employment following the first payment), they will not receive further funding.

- If the applicant does not successfully complete an approved program of study and submit their official academic transcript by the application close date, their application for that year will not be accepted.
- If the applicant enters into the Grant Agreement and does not comply with its terms and conditions, they may be required to refund any amounts paid.
- By entering into the Grant Agreement, the applicant consents to the State of Victoria sharing information provided by them within the Victorian Government and between the Victorian Government and external parties for the purposes of validating enrolment and other eligibility requirements, including:
 - The applicant’s education provider.
 - The applicant’s employer.
 - The Australian Government Department of Education.
 - The Australian Government Department of Home Affairs.
 - Victorian Government departments including Department of Health, the Department of Government Services and Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions.
 - Victorian Public Health Services.
- Applications and claims may be subject to audit by the Victorian Government or its representatives for a period of up to three years following the completion of the grant period to determine whether the application and information provided during the term of the Agreement was compliant.
- The Victorian Government Services may, at any time, remove an applicant from the application assessment process or terminate an agreement if, in the department’s opinion, association with the applicant may bring the department, a minister or the Victorian Government into disrepute.
- The applicant is responsible for informing Department of Government Services via email of changes to their circumstances, including:
 - Changes to contact details, such as address, mobile number, email and bank account details.
 - Changes to their eligibility.
- Program surveys and evaluation: applicants must agree to participate in the Victorian Government’s performance monitoring and evaluation of this Program by completing survey questions, which may be for a period of up to three years after applying to the Program. This information will be treated in accordance with the privacy statement detailed above.
- Fraudulent claims: By submitting the application form, the applicant declares that the information provided in the application form and supporting documentation is true, accurate and not misleading about a material fact. If any information in the application or claims for payment is found to be false, misleading or fraudulent (as determined by the administering department in its discretion), the grant will be repayable on demand and the Victorian Government reserves the right to take further action, including referring the applicant to the relevant law enforcement agency. Providing inaccurate, untrue, or misleading information may result in an offence being committed and serious penalties may apply.
- An eligible applicant can only receive the grant (maximum amount of \$15,000) once.

8.0 Other information

- The administering department reserves the right to amend these guidelines and application terms at any time as it deems appropriate (subject to appropriate notice being given either by publication on the Grant Program website or by email to applicants).

- If an unsuccessful applicant considers that their application has been incorrectly assessed, they may contact Department of Government Services in writing at spots@grants.vic.gov.au.

9.0 Contact us

Please refer to the Frequently Asked Questions or contact spots@grants.vic.gov.au with any grant program queries.

Appendix 1: Definitions

Term	Definition
Grant Program	Speech Pathology and Occupational Therapy Student Grant Program
Administrator/s	Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions and/or the Department of Government Services, who will be responsible for administering the Grants on behalf of the Victorian Department of Health.
Grant	The two instalment payments made by the Administrators to a successful applicant in accordance with these Guidelines.
Grant Agreement	An agreement formed between a successful applicant and the Administrators, using funding received from the Victorian Department of Health, including the submitted application form and these Guidelines.
Victorian Government	State of Victoria, currently being represented by the Victorian Department of Health for the purposes of these Guidelines.
The department	Victorian Department of Health.
Current payslip	A payslip from within six weeks from application, from an employer indicating current employment at a minimum 0.4 FTE.
Grant period	The 12-month period in which the two instalment payments are distributed to the successful applicants as outlined in clause 1.0, Program Dates
Approved program of study	<p>An accredited course in occupational therapy or speech pathology, inclusive of undergraduate, post graduate entry to practice and other post-graduate programs of study. Eligible programs of study include all those in Australia and overseas. For eligible applicants who have completed a program of study overseas, they must have already obtained the other residency or VISA requirements to work in Australia and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For occupational therapists: have completed at a minimum, stage one of assessment by the Occupational Therapy Board of Australia, with conditional approval of stage two upon completing workplace supervision. If the applicant does not successfully complete stage two assessment once in an Australian workplace in a reasonable timeframe, the applicant will not be eligible for further payments. • For speech pathologists: have either, an approved Mutual Recognition of Credentials application or successful completion of an Overseas Qualification Competency Assessment via Speech Pathology Australia.
Victorian Public Health Service	A Victorian Public Health Service refers to a public health service listed in Schedule 1 – 5 (inclusive) in the <i>Health Services Act 1988</i>
FTE	Full Time Equivalent (FTE) hours of working as an occupational therapist or speech pathologist.

Appendix 2: Border communities

Eligible Local Government Area border communities:

New South Wales:

Balranald Shire
Bega Valley Shire
Berrigan Shire
City of Albury
City of Broken Hill
City of Wagga Wagga
Edward River Council
Federation Council
Greater Hume Shire
Hay Shire
Lockhart Shire
Murray River Council
Murrumbidgee Council
Snowy Monaro Regional Council
Snowy Valleys Council
Wentworth Shire

South Australia:

Berri Barmera Council
City of Mount Gambier
District Council of Grant
District Council of Loxton Waikerie
District Council of Robe
Kingston District Council
Naracoorte Lucindale Council
Renmark Paringa Council
Southern Mallee District Council
Tatiara District Council
Wattle Range Council

To receive this document in another format, phone [95952387](tel:95952387), using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email Health Workforce Policy Team 2 at alliedhealthworkforce@health.vic.gov.au.

Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.

© State of Victoria, Australia, Department of Health, October 2024.