



Communities
& Justice

NSW Spectacles Program Guidelines

June 2020

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1. Legislative framework

The Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) delivers services to some of the most disadvantaged individuals, families and communities in NSW. DCJ helps vulnerable people to participate fully in social and economic life and build stronger, more sustainable and inclusive communities.

DCJ operates within the legal framework set by the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998, the Community Welfare Act 1987 and the Adoptions Act 2000 and the regulations associated with these acts.

The department also works to promote the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and help those who are vulnerable and most in need. DCJ works closely with other government departments, non-government organisations (NGOs) and the community to achieve this.

2. Policy directions and commitments

NSW State Plan, NSW 2021

The NSW Government's State Plan, NSW 2021, aims to rebuild the economy, return quality services, renovate infrastructure, restore accountability to government and strengthen the local environment and communities. The focus is on collaboration across portfolio areas and with the non-government sector to design and deliver innovative support services where needed.

DCJ is responsible for delivering on two goals within the State Plan:

- better protect the most vulnerable members of our community and break the cycle of disadvantage
- increase opportunities for people with a disability by providing supports that meet their individual needs and realise their potential.

The NSW Spectacles Program is closely aligned to the first of these DCJ-specific goals.

National Framework for Action to Promote Eye Health and Prevent Avoidable Blindness and Vision Loss

The framework was endorsed in November 2005 by the Australian Health Ministers' Conference and

...sets out a strategic National Framework for Action for the promotion of eye health and the prevention of avoidable blindness. It aims to provide a blueprint for nationally coordinated action by governments, health professionals, non-government organisations, industry and individuals to work in partnership...'

The framework represents the Australian response to the World Health Assembly resolution on the elimination of avoidable blindness in member countries. It sets out five key areas for action, including 'improving access to eye health care services' with

the objective that ‘All Australians have equitable access to appropriate eye health care when required.’

FACS Strategic Plan 2017–2021

The vision of the Strategic Plan is that *‘All people are empowered to live fulfilling lives and achieve their potential in inclusive communities’*.

In line with NSW 2021, the FACS Strategic Plan articulates priorities for achieving outcomes. Relevant to this program the Strategic Plan aims to ensure *‘more people have safe, stable places to live – and the family lives, jobs, well-being and dignity which that makes possible’*.

The relevant priority areas are:

- Improve long term outcomes (especially for Aboriginal children and families)
- Improve client experience

3. Program context

The NSW Spectacles program is related to a number of NSW and federal health programs and activities. These include:

- two year Medicare-funded eye tests
- the Department of Veterans’ Affairs subsidised spectacle program
- NSW Statewide Eyesight Preschooler Screening (StEPS)
- dedicated NSW and federal Aboriginal eye health programs¹
- the Visiting Optometrist Scheme (VOS)².

The NSW Spectacles Program should be administered in coordination with the NSW and federal eye health programs and be viewed as part of a wider continuum of care and service delivery. In particular, eligible citizens’ knowledge of the NSW Spectacles Program will rely on strong awareness through other service providers and referral pathways. This will include non-program stakeholders including in the areas of disability and aged support.

4. Program description

The NSW Government established the NSW Spectacles Program in 1992. The program aims to assist those who are most vulnerable and disadvantaged in the community by providing them with free optical appliances, as required, through a

¹ See for example NSW Health. 2011. ‘Eye Health Services for Aboriginal People: A Review within the Greater Western Region of NSW.’ This report notes the linkage between the Aboriginal eye health service system and the NSW Spectacles Program. See http://www0.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/2011/pdf/review_of_aboriginal_eye_.pdf

² The VOS Guidelines for Participating Optometrists make note of the state based subsidised spectacles programs. In particular, alignment to these programs is considered in applications and participating optometrists are expected to inform those on a health care card about such programs. See <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ruralhealth-vos-guidelines>.

network of approved participating optometrists and optical dispensers. A number of eligibility criteria are applied to target the available program funds to those with greatest need. The program involves contracting an external program provider to administer the program and its funding.

Program outcome

The NSW Spectacles program aims to ensure that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in NSW receive free optical appliances as required to allow them to live fuller lives and avoid preventable deterioration in eye and general health.

Principles for program delivery

The NSW Spectacles program, and the program provider, is guided by service principles including:

- optical appliances are provided to vulnerable and disadvantaged people in a respectful and timely manner
- optical appliances are supplied at no cost to the individual
- service network coverage is maintained across the state of NSW
- products funded are of good quality, namely they have a useful and/or guaranteed life of at least two years
- efforts are made to reduce as far as practicable the administrative burden on participating optometrists and optical dispensers
- the integrity of the program and use of public funds is monitored and assured
- the number of optical appliances supplied is maximised subject to the other principles listed here and the fixed funding for the program.

Program model

The program operates on a market-based model whereby participating optometrists and optical dispensers use their own supply chains to buy program products at an agreed price point, for which they are reimbursed.

5. Evidence base

Avoidable Blindness and Vision Loss

Low vision is an important area of concern in public health in Australia with studies³. Vision 2020⁴ estimates that more than 450,000 Australians are living with vision impairment or blindness. This number will grow as Australia's population ages. Importantly, approximately 90 per cent of blindness or vision impairment is preventable or treatable. 62 per cent of vision impairment is caused by uncorrected

³ See Access Economics. 2010. 'Clear Focus: The Economic Impact of Vision Loss in Australia in 2009 – An overview of the report prepared for Vision 2020 Australia.' Also see Taylor, HR et al. 2005. *Vision loss in Australia*. Medical Journal of Australia. 182(11):565–8.

⁴ <http://www.vision2020australia.org.au/>

refractive error. Refractive error can be treated with appropriate glasses. The prevalence of blindness and vision impairment among Indigenous Australians is three times that of non-indigenous Australians.

It is known that disadvantaged people face access challenges in the health system, with many avoiding insurance and care due to cost.⁵

Role of low cost spectacles

Research⁶ into eye health interventions has found that provision of subsidised spectacles is a highly cost-effective initiative and is cost-saving over the long term. The underlying savings are not explained in the research, however it is relatively straightforward to surmise that the provision of appropriate spectacles halts or prevents deterioration of vision and the associated direct and indirect costs mentioned above.

6. Target group

Eligibility criteria

The limited funds for the NSW Spectacles Program are targeted at the most vulnerable and disadvantaged residents of NSW. Under the NSW Spectacles Program optical appliances may be provided free of charge once every two years (if required) to those who:

- are Australian permanent residents living permanently in NSW
- have less than \$500 of total assets if single or less than \$1,000 in total family assets if in a couple or a single parent (excluding funeral fund savings)
- have not received spectacles or other optical appliances under the program within the past two years
- are not eligible to receive free optical appliances under another program (e.g. Department of Veterans' Affairs).

To be eligible, the recipient must also be:

- on a full (non-reduced) Commonwealth pension, benefit or allowance and not receive an additional income above the pension, benefit or allowance
- or:

⁵ For example, of the close to half of Australians without private health cover, 58% noted this was due to affordability (ABS. 43640D0003_20072008 National Health Survey: Summary of Results, 2007–2008 (Reissue); almost 20% of people avoid or delay seeing dental practitioners due to cost and those in the areas of most socio-economic disadvantage were over 10 percentage points more likely to avoid or delay (ABS. 4839.0 - Patient Experiences in Australia: Summary of Findings, 2012-13); Experience in Victoria's Spectacles Program supports the notion that cost is significant motivating factor for using the program, with 58.3% of survey respondents stating that subsidised spectacles was the incentive for their visit and 87.5% stating that the availability of subsidised spectacles helped them financially in their day to day life.

⁶ See Access Economics. 2005. 'Investing in Sight: Strategic Interventions to Prevent Vision Loss in Australia.' Report prepared for Eye Research Australia. Also see Taylor, HR et al. 2006. *Costs of Interventions for Visual Impairment*. American Journal of Ophthalmology. 143(4):561–5.

- a low income earner with net income no greater than the full Newstart allowance if under retirement age or the full aged pension if over the retirement age.

Note all dependent children aged under 18 of the recipient are eligible for the program.

Exception rules

- Eligible citizens are entitled to additional pairs of spectacles in the event of damage or loss within the two-year period. The program provider will monitor repeat visits and replacements will be subject to the discretion of the program provider.
- Eligible citizens are entitled to a new pair of spectacles within the two-year period where there is a medically determined need for a change in script.
- Women and children experiencing domestic violence or in shelters are exempt from income and asset related eligibility criteria.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians may be excluded from all eligibility criteria under the introduction of the pilot Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eligibility criteria.
- Discretion may be applied where the Centrelink income statement shows assets between \$500 and \$600.
- Where additional income relates the child maintenance payments a single parent will be eligible where they meet all of the following:
 - Maximum Rate Family Tax Benefit (A)
 - Maximum Rate Parenting Payment Single
 - All children listed have percentage care at 100%
 - Income type is Maintenance Income no more than \$399 annually (\$399 is the annual rate of child support the other parent has been assessed as required to pay. It is the lowest amount that the CSA formula generates meaning the other parent is also on low income)
 - Assets are in line with existing eligibility criteria

Definitions

- Assets are defined as monies held by the applicant and/or by their spouse/partner in a bank, building society, credit union accounts etc., cash, property (but not the home in which you reside), investments, shares, accessible superannuation or superannuation rollovers. (Assets do not include a car, furniture or personal possessions).
- Additional income includes gross income from wages or casual earnings, overseas pension, maintenance payments, compensation payments, gross rental income from property or gross business income etc. There are a number of

supplementary Commonwealth and department benefits and payments which are not considered income.

7. Service types or activities to be funded

Service and products

Within the total allocated budget to the NSW Spectacles Program the program provider is responsible for the supply of products through the participating optometrists and optical dispensers. Eligible vulnerable and disadvantaged residents will be provided with appropriate optical appliances to meet their vision needs as determined by a qualified medical professional participating as an approved optometrist or optical dispenser. Where multiple appropriate options exist, the cheapest option should be chosen.

The program provider is responsible for ensuring there is participating optometrists and optical dispensers covering the state in all major cities and in most major rural and regional towns.

Appropriate single vision, bifocal and contact lens options should be provided under the program. Low vision aids and other medically appropriate optical appliances will be considered special items under the program and will require specific criteria and monitoring. A proportion of the budget will be preserved for non-standard items including contact lenses, lens treatments and low vision aids.

Spectacles and optical appliances covered by the program:

- Single vision stock and grind spectacles.
- Bifocals.
- Two pairs of near and distance spectacles when bifocals are not suitable.
- Contact lenses for particular clinical needs.
- Low vision aids for particular clinical needs.

Special claims can be put forward for approval for items valued higher than the reimbursement rate when the patient presents with a valid clinical need.

Spectacles and optical appliances not covered by the program:

- Multifocals
- Transition lenses
- Multicoat

The program provider is required to develop an approach and specific criteria to manage requests for low vision aids and other medically appropriate non-spectacle optical appliances. The criteria must ensure that provision is limited to cases where the optical appliances are deemed to be medically required by the participating optometrist.

Pricing and volume considerations

The operating model requires participating optometrists and optical dispensers to utilise their own supply chains in order to source products funded by the program on behalf of clients. Under this model optometrists receive a dispensing fee for their services.

The current subsidy for Metro and Rural providers is at **Attachment A**.

8. Annual Review

DCJ and the service provider will undertake an annual review of these program guidelines. Industry participants or experts may be invited to participate in the review as required. The review will include but not be limited to:

- Eligibility criteria
- Product inclusions and product quality
- Reimbursement to participating optometrists and optical suppliers
- Service results and performance measures.

9. Service Results and performance measures

The priority service results for the program are:

1. Eligible vulnerable and disadvantaged people in NSW receive free optical appliances as required.
2. Service network coverage across the State is maintained and increased to reduce gaps.
3. Products funded are of good quality with a guaranteed life of at least two years.
4. Efforts are made to reduce, as far as practicable, the administrative burden on participating optometrists and optical dispensers.
5. Vulnerable and disadvantaged people in NSW are strengthened by the receipt of free optical appliances.
6. The Spectacles Program achieves value for money in the provision of free optical appliances to those in need across NSW.

This table lists the standard performance measure, service results and/or outcomes and key performance measures sought from the program provider.

Outcomes/ Service Results	Performance measures	Data set	Performance Targets
Vulnerable and disadvantaged people in NSW receive free optical appliances when eligible	Number of spectacles provided each year is maximised subject to Program funding; and value for money is achieved.	Number of spectacles provided is reported <number> with percentage to targeted communities (Aboriginal, people living with domestic violence and homeless people) <%>	Increase annual volume of successful applications to 47,500 by 2023. Maintain 15% clients from Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. Develop and implement improved metric to capture service to people affected by homelessness & family violence by 2021.
Aboriginal people in NSW	Number of Aboriginal people	Volume individuals identified as	Volume of Aboriginal recipients

Outcomes/ Service Results	Performance measures	Data set	Performance Targets
receive free optical appliances when eligible.	are represented and reflects the estimated need amongst eligible population.	Aboriginal who receive a service as a percentage of estimated need	represents 40% estimated annual need by 2023.
Service network coverage across the State is maintained and increased to reduce gaps	Services are delivered to all areas of identified need across NSW. Where gaps are identified, service provision is addressed during the year.	Percentage of optical appliance supplied to targeted areas of disadvantage across the State <%>; and the % products supplied between metro and non-metro areas.	30% optical appliances supplied in LGAs of SEIFA:IER 3 decile or lower. Distribution of optical appliances supplied is 70%:30% between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas.
Products funded are of good quality with a guaranteed life of at least two years.	Number of clients who report products received are high quality with life-span of two years or more.	Clients report on quality and life-span of goods received via annual survey result.	More than 85% of clients report average to good quality product and that they are happy with the lifespan of goods. (5% of clients surveyed).
Service value to the community is increased through participation in networking opportunities with optometrists, industry peers and community services networks.	Number of networking opportunities across the community and benefits is reported.	Number and type of networking opportunities, detailing benefits to the program and community is reported.	Strategic Education and relationship development with at least 5 organisations in target 1 LGA each month is achieved.
Vulnerable and disadvantaged people in NSW are strengthened by the receipt of free optical appliances.	Proportion of clients who report improvements in physical health and wellbeing.	Percentage of clients who report improvements in wellbeing <%> via survey.	85% of clients report an improvement in their wellbeing. (5% of beneficiaries to be surveyed annually.)
Service providers are well supported to provide Spectacles Program services and support education about the program.	Ease of use in processing a referral. Recipients are well educated about the program. Service Providers are supportive of the program.	Percentage of service providers who report ease of use in processing referrals; % of service providers who report they feel supported to educate recipients about the program;	85% satisfaction by service Providers. 85% services providers report feeling supported to provide recipients with information about the Program. 5% of

Outcomes/ Service Results	Performance measures	Data set	Performance Targets
		and % of service providers who are satisfied the program.	service providers to be surveyed and reported on in annual report.

10. Reporting and data collection strategies

The program provider will report to DCJ on performance targets on a quarterly basis. Delivery of the program, and provider performance will be discussed at quarterly meetings between DCJ and the provider. The program provider will report annually on their service and financial activities as part of FACS acquittals requirements.

The program provider is expected to store electronic data for the program to support it in meeting service principles as well as to satisfy reporting, monitoring and accountability requirements.

NSW Spectacles Program: Product Price Schedule

July 2019

Metropolitan providers

Spectacles (total reimbursements amounts includes Frames, Lenses, Case & Dispensing)

	Metro (ex-GST)	GST amount	Metro (incl GST)
Single vision spectacles			
Total reimbursement amount	\$60.91	\$5.31	\$66.22
Bifocals			
Total reimbursement amount	\$83.07	\$6.10	\$89.17
Grind single vision spectacles (Conditional item) ⁽¹⁾			
Total reimbursement amount	\$86.37	\$5.32	\$91.69
Two pair single vision spectacles – near and distance (Conditional item) ⁽¹⁾			
Total reimbursement amount	\$96.40	\$7.43	\$103.83

Other conditional items (demonstrated clinical need only)

	Metro (ex-GST)	GST amount	Metro (incl GST)
Tinting	\$5.53	\$0.00	\$5.53
Contact lenses	\$234.77	\$0.00	\$234.77

Low vision aids (demonstrated clinical need only)

	Metro (ex-GST)	GST amount	Metro (incl GST)
Low vision aid dispensing fee	\$49.84	\$4.98	\$54.82

Non-Metropolitan providers

Spectacles (total reimbursements amounts includes Frames, Lenses, Case & Dispensing)

	Non-Metro (ex-GST)	GST amount	Non-Metro (incl GST)
Single vision spectacles			
Total reimbursement amount	\$71.92	\$6.41	\$78.33
Bifocals (includes lenses, frame, case)			
Total reimbursement amount	\$94.13	\$7.21	\$101.34
Grind single vision spectacles (Conditional item) ⁽¹⁾			
Total reimbursement amount	\$97.45	\$6.43	\$103.88
Two pair single vision spectacles – near and distance (Conditional item) ⁽¹⁾			
Total reimbursement amount	\$107.48	\$8.54	\$116.02

Other conditional items (demonstrated clinical need only)

	Non-Metro (ex-GST)	GST amount	Non-Metro (incl GST)
Tinting	\$5.53	\$0.00	\$5.53
Contact lenses (corneal conditions)	\$245.85	\$0.00	\$245.85

Low vision aids (demonstrated clinical need only)

	Non-Metro (ex-GST)	GST amount	Non-Metro (incl GST)
Low vision aid dispensing fee	\$49.84	\$4.98	\$54.82