Australian Government
Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

COST RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION STATEMENT

Approval process for pharmacists seeking approval to provide Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme medicines

2026-27

Charging for regulatory activity involves government entities charging individuals or organisations in the non-government sector some or all of the minimum efficient costs of a specific government activity. The Cost Recovery Policy along with the Australian Government Charging Framework sets out the policy under which government entities design, implement and review charging for regulatory activities. The Cost Recovery Implementation Statement is the public document to ensure the transparency and accountability for the level of the charging and to demonstrate that the purpose for charging, as decided by Government, is being achieved.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Purpose

This Cost Recovery Implementation Statement (CRIS) provides information on how the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (the department) implements cost recovery for the process for pharmacists seeking approval to provide pharmaceutical benefits from pharmacy premises. It reports actual financial and non-financial performance information for the pharmacy approval process and contains financial and demand forecasts for 2026-27 and three forward years. The department will maintain the CRIS until the activity or cost recovery for the activity has been discontinued.

The approval of pharmacists to supply pharmaceutical benefits is legislated under the *National Health Act 1953* (the Act). Section 90 of the Act provides that the Secretary may, upon application by a pharmacist for approval to supply pharmaceutical benefits at particular premises, approve that pharmacist for the purpose of supplying pharmaceutical benefits at those premises.

An application under section 90 must be referred to the Australian Community Pharmacy Authority (the Authority) unless the application is for the change of ownership of a pharmacy and the pharmacy is to continue to operate at the same premises.

The Authority is a statutory authority established under section 99J of the Act, to consider applications against the requirements of the Pharmacy Location Rules (the Rules) made by the Minister for Health and Ageing under section 99L of the Act, currently the National Health (Australian Community Pharmacy Authority Rules) Determination 2018.

Cost recovery applies to pharmacists seeking to establish a new pharmacy or relocate an existing pharmacy approved to supply pharmaceutical benefits, and pharmacists wishing to change ownership of a pharmacy or expand or contract the size of a pharmacy premises. Cost recovery consists of application fees to recover the costs for the processes.

Consistent with the Australian Government Charging Framework (the Charging Framework), applicants are charged an application fee as they create the need for the regulatory activity by seeking approval to supply pharmaceutical benefits from a pharmacy premises. Applicants lodging their application are required to pay the application fee at the time they submit their application.

2. POLICY AND STATUTORY AUTHORITY TO CHARGE (COST RECOVER)

2.1. Government policy approval to charge for this regulatory activity

The Government announced the decision to fully recover costs for the pharmacy approval process in the 2018-19 Federal Budget. The measure “Improving Access to Medicines – Sustainability of the pharmacy approval process” included the transfer of pharmacy approvals function from the then Department of Human Services to the department, the development of an IT portal to accept applications, and full cost recovery in the form of application fees.

2.2. Statutory authority to charge

Amendments to section 90 of the Act were made to enable cost recovery to commence. These amendments came into effect on 2 December 2019, allowing for the Minister to determine the fees by legislative instrument. The National Health (Application Fees for Pharmacist Approvals) Determination 2020 (the Determination), setting out the fees, came into effect on 1 July 2020.

3. CHARGING (COST RECOVERY) MODEL

3.1. Outputs and business processes of the activity

The objective of this regulatory charging activity is to improve the efficiency, productivity and responsiveness of the pharmacy approval process and accountability of the submission of pharmacy approval applications. Pharmacists must apply for approval in four different scenarios:

- establishment of a new pharmacy
- relocation of an existing pharmacy currently approved to supply pharmaceutical benefits
- change of ownership of a pharmacy currently approved to supply pharmaceutical benefits
- expansion or contraction of a pharmacy currently approved to supply pharmaceutical benefits.

Establishment of a new pharmacy and relocation of an existing pharmacy

Approval must be sought from the delegate of the Secretary, via the pharmacy approvals process, before a new pharmacy or a relocated pharmacy can provide pharmaceutical benefits at new premises. Applications for new or relocating pharmacies are assessed by the Authority against the Rules. Subsequently, the Authority makes a recommendation to the delegate before the delegate makes a decision.

The applications requiring involvement of the Authority (i.e. new and relocated pharmacies) are classified as "complex" applications.

The key business processes are:

- receipt, validation, and registration of applications
- consultation with third parties for 'new' pharmacy applications
- provision of applications to members of the Authority for assessment
- provision of secretariat support to the Authority, both before and after the relevant meeting and through attendance at the meeting
- provision of notifications of decisions and reasons for decisions to applicants.

Change of ownership and expansion or contraction of an existing pharmacy

Approval must also be sought from the delegate of the Secretary, via the pharmacy approvals process, where a pharmacist wishes to sell or transfer ownership of their pharmacy (without relocation), or where a pharmacist wishes to change the size of an existing pharmacy premises. However, these applications are not required to be referred to the Authority and are not assessed against the requirements of the Rules.

These applications are classified as "simple" applications.

The key business processes are:

- receipt, validation, and registration of applications
- assessment of the application
- provision of notifications of decisions and reasons for decisions to applicants.

3.2. Costs of the regulatory activity

The approach used to determine the costs of this regulatory charging activity is an Activity-Based Costing (ABC) methodology for the allocation of all direct and indirect costs to the pharmacy approval activities. Direct and indirect costs have been estimated based on the average time required to assess one application. Direct costs are those costs that can be directly attributed to the regulatory charging activity, such as staffing costs. Indirect costs are those costs which are difficult to link to individual activities, such as corporate overhead costs. All indirect costs have been disaggregated and spread throughout the model to provide the full cost of each activity, on the basis of full-time staff equivalents involved in the activity.

Other costs of the activity are delivered by the Authority, which makes recommendations on the complex applications. These costs include sitting and preparation fees as determined by the Remuneration Tribunal. While costs previously included travel and accommodation, travel restrictions and lockdowns resulting from COVID-19 led to meetings being conducted online. This will be revisited if there is an operational need to meet face to face.

The 2018-19 Budget provided capital funding to implement a new IT portal to be cost recovered over the useful life of the asset. In 2024-25, the department reviewed the application of AASB 116 Property, Plant and Equipment, and AASB 138 Intangible Assets against the recognition and measurement of its internally developed computer software. As a result of this review, the IT portal has been reclassified to a Software as a Service (SaaS) arrangement. The costs associated with the development of this project will be expensed through to the 2029-30 financial year.

A review of fees is undertaken on an annual basis which consists of assessing the cost of the activities and applying indexation. The review of costs and volumes for the 2026-27 financial year showed a negligible change in total costs for both simple and complex applications. As a result, fees for applications are unchanged for the 2026-27 financial year, at $465 and $1,370 respectively.

TABLE 1: ESTIMATED COST PER SUBMISSION 2026-27

	Direct Costs	Indirect Costs	Total
Activity 1 - Simple Submissions			
Direct and Indirect Costs			
Accept, Register & Check Application	$22	$7	$29
Assess Application	$63	$18	$81
Notifications and Correspondences	$63	$19	$82
	$148	**$44**	**$192**
Portal - Software as a Service Expense		$216	$216
Supplier Costs		$51	$51
Total Cost for Simple Submissions:	**$148**	**$311**	**$458**
Activity 2 - Complex Submissions			
Direct and Indirect Costs			
Accept, Register & Check Application	$83	$25	$108
Assess Application	$143	$38	$181
Notifications and Correspondences	$65	$18	$83
ACPA Secretariat - Pre & Post	$144	$38	$182
	$434	**$120**	**$554**
Portal - Software as a Service Expense		$370	$370
Supplier Costs		$105	$105
ACPA Meeting Costs		$357	$357
Total Cost for Complex Submissions:	**$434**	**$952**	**$1,386**

The department reviews its administrative processes and forecasted volume of applications each year to estimate the cost of the regulatory charging activity for the next financial year.

3.3. Design of the regulatory charge

The cost recovery fees are defined by application category and are set out in the Determination. The fee category descriptions are as follows:

Pharmacy Approval Fee Category Description

Application Category	Description
New pharmacy – complex	This is an application that seeks approval for an applicant pharmacist to supply pharmaceutical benefits from a new pharmacy premises. Reviews and assessments by the Authority are required for these applications. This adds an element of complexity to the process. As a result, this application falls under the "complex" category.
Relocation – complex	This is an application that seeks approval for an applicant pharmacist to provide pharmaceutical benefits at new pharmacy premises by relocation of a pharmacy already approved to supply pharmaceutical benefits. Reviews and assessments by the Authority are required for these applications. This adds an element of complexity to the process. As a result, this application falls under the "complex" category. The level of processing effort required is the same as establishing a new pharmacy.
Change of ownership – simple	This is an application that seeks approval for an applicant pharmacist by changing ownership of a pharmacy already approved to supply pharmaceutical benefits. These applications do not require assessment by the Authority.
Expansion/Contraction – simple	This is an application that seeks approval for an applicant pharmacist to expand or contract their pharmacy premises at which they are approved to supply pharmaceutical benefits. These applications do not require assessment by the Authority.

TABLE 2: CHARGING CATEGORY

	Type	Unit cost	Unit price	Estimated volume	Estimated total cost	Estimated total revenue
Simple	Fee	$ 458	$ 465	541	$ 248,034	$ 251,565
Complex	Fee	$ 1,386	$ 1,370	247	$ 342,362	$ 338,390
Total - Fee Paying					**$ 590,396**	**$ 589,955**

4. RISK ASSESSMENT

A Charging Risk Assessment (CRA) was undertaken in March 2026 which resulted in a low-risk rating.

5. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

This cost recovery proposal was initially proposed by the Pharmacy Guild of Australia (the Guild) in 2016 due to the issue of applications with little prospect of approval being submitted.

The department considered the proposal and consulted with the Department of Finance to ensure compliance with the Charging Framework.

Following the announcement of the introduction of cost recovery for pharmacy approvals in the 2018-19 Federal Budget, the department engaged with industry in August 2018 to discuss any concerns or suggestions regarding the implementation of cost recovery arrangements. Industry stakeholders that were represented included the Guild, the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia and the Australian Friendly Societies Pharmacies Association. The industry stakeholders acknowledged and supported the introduction of cost recovery application fees.

In accordance with the Charging Framework, the CRIS is reviewed and updated at least annually. Stakeholders are advised of each review and its outcome. Further stakeholder consultation will be undertaken if significant policy or fee changes are proposed, however, feedback on this CRIS is welcomed by emailing pbsapprovedsuppliers@health.gov.au.

6. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

6.1. Financial Estimates

TABLE 3: FINANCIAL ESTIMATES

	2026-27 $'000	2027-28 $'000	2028-29 $'000	2029-30 $'000
Total revenue	$ 590	$ 600	$ 607	$ 550
Total expenses^	$ 730	$ 741	$ 751	$ 670
Balance (revenue - expense)	-$ 140	-$ 141	-$ 144	-$ 120
Cumulative balance	-$ 167	-$ 308	-$ 452	-$ 572

^Expenses include costs associated with resubmissions, rejection notifications, deferral notifications and processing other documents that incur costs which are not recovered.

The figures in table 3 are forward estimates. Please see section 6.2 (table 4) for actual financial performance figures.

The financial performance of this program is reviewed annually with the aim to achieve alignment between revenue and expenses within a variance of 5%. If the variance is greater than 5% the department will consider its balance management strategy. Cost recovery fees are charged on a per application basis. Actual revenue and expenses may vary in line with the fluctuations in the actual volume and type of applications received.

6.2. Financial Outcomes

TABLE 4: FINANCIAL OUTCOMES

	2022-23 $'000	2023-24 $'000	2024-25 $'000	2025-26 $'000
Estimates				
Revenue (X)	$ 628	$ 631	$ 646	$ 579
Expenses (Y)	$ 649	$ 651	$ 669	$ 711
Balance (X-Y)	-$ 21	-$ 20	-$ 23	-$ 132
Actuals				
Revenue (X)	$ 780	$ 726	$ 693	$ 583
Expenses (Y)	$ 654	$ 684	$ 673	$ 722
Balance (X-Y)	$ 126	$ 42	$ 20	-$ 138
Cumulative balance	$ 49	$ 91	$ 111	-$ 27

7. NON-FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

We have shown the actual volumes of applications received over the last 4 years and forecast figures for the current financial year and forward years.

Output description	Total output volume	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30
Application fee - Simple	Actuals	513	524	585	499				
	Estimated	420	420	490	523	523	523	523	523
Application fee - Complex	Actuals	254	257	230	251				
	Estimated	235	235	234	245	245	245	245	245

The volumes for these applications are variable, and they are expected to fluctuate between reporting periods. The 'actual' figures reflect the number of applications received and subsequently assessed.

8. KEY FORWARD DATES AND EVENTS

Activity	Information to be included and requirements	Due Date
Annual indexation of fees	Review of charging model for 2027-28 financial year	31 March 2027
Update of CRIS for 2027-28	Indexation of 2027-28 fees and updates to forward estimates	30 June 2027
Update of CRIS	Report on financial and non-financial results for 2026-27 financial year	30 November 2027

9. CRIS APPROVAL AND CHANGE REGISTER

Date of change	CRIS change	Approver	Basis for change
November 2026	Update of CRIS results for 2025-26	First Assistant Secretary, Benefits Integrity Division	Reporting financial and non-financial results for 2025-26
Aprill 2026	Agreement to 2026-27 CRIS	First Assistant Secretary, Benefits Integrity Division	Review of fees, financial estimates and narrative
November 2025	Update of CRIS results for 2024-25	First Assistant Secretary, Benefits Integrity Division	Reporting financial and non-financial results for 2024-25
April 2025	Agreement to 2025-26 CRIS	First Assistant Secretary, Benefits Integrity Division	Review of fees, financial estimates and narrative
November 2024	Update of CRIS results for 2023-24	First Assistant Secretary, Benefits Integrity Division	Reporting financial and non-financial results for 2023-24
April 2024	Agreement to 2024-25 CRIS	a/g First Assistant Secretary, Benefits Integrity Division	Review of fees, financial estimates and narrative
November 2023	Update of CRIS results for 2022-23	a/g First Assistant Secretary, Benefits Integrity Division	Reporting financial and non-financial results for 2022-23
April 2023	Agreement to 2023-24 CRIS	First Assistant Secretary, Benefits Integrity Division	Review of fees, financial estimates and narrative
November 2022	Update of CRIS results for 2021-22	First Assistant Secretary, Benefits Integrity and Digital Health Division	Reporting financial and non-financial results for 2021-22

Date of change	CRIS change	Approver	Basis for change
June 2022	Agreement to 2022-23 CRIS	First Assistant Secretary, Benefits Integrity and Digital Health Division	Update of fees, financial estimates and narrative
November 2021	Update of CRIS results for 2020-21	First Assistant Secretary, Benefits Integrity and Digital Health Division	Reporting financial and non-financial results for 2020-21
June 2021	Agreement to 2021-22 CRIS	Minister for Health	Update of fees
May 2021	Update of CRIS for 2021-22	Secretary, Department of Health	Update of fees, financial estimates and narrative
April 2020	Agreement to the CRIS	Minister for Health	New regulatory charging activity
March 2020	Certification of the CRIS	Secretary, Department of Health	New regulatory charging activity