

Dependant Support Policy and Procedure

Introduction

The Australian Volunteers program recognises the considerable contribution dependants make in country whilst supporting a volunteer on assignment. Accordingly, a limited amount of financial support is budgeted to support partners and children of volunteers on assignments with a duration of 12 or more months.

Although the program has a strong commitment to being family friendly, the budget is limited and it may not always be possible to approve Dependant Support Applications, depending on the numbers of volunteers and dependants mobilised each year.

Definitions

Supported dependant: an immediate family member (child, spouse or de facto partner) who accompanies you on assignment and who has been approved by Scope Global as a dependant, therefore entitling you to additional support.

Unsupported dependant: an immediate family member (child, spouse or de facto partner) who accompanies you on assignment but has not been approved by Scope Global as a dependant and for whom you do not receive any support from the program.

Child: your child (under the age of 18), including a child legally adopted by you, who is unmarried and ordinarily resides with you.

Spouse: a partner who is legally married to you.

De facto partner: a person who is involved with a partner of the opposite sex or of the same sex where it is satisfied that:

- The de facto relationship has been stable for 12 months or more
- There is an intention on the part of both parties that the relationship continue indefinitely
- The couple regard themselves as de facto partners

What sort of support is available?

For a maximum of TWO approved Dependants (partner and/or children) the Australian Volunteer Program will cover:

- A Dependant Allowance equal to 25% of the volunteer's Living and Accommodation Allowance per month (this means a maximum of 50% of the volunteer's Living and Accommodation Allowance will be provided, even when the number of approved dependants exceeds two). This allowance will be paid to the volunteer in addition to their normal allowance. No allowances are paid directly to the dependant.

For ALL approved Dependants the Australian Volunteers program will cover:

- The cost of pre and post-medical assessments. As with volunteers, it is a requirement that any pre-existing medical conditions be disclosed during the medical assessment. If a dependant cannot obtain medical clearance program support for the dependant will be withdrawn.
- Comprehensive insurance for the duration of the assignment
- Return economy airfares to the country of assignment, valid for the duration of the placement
- Expenses associated with obtaining and renewing dependant visas (the program cannot guarantee a dependant will be able to obtain a visa).
- Attendance at an Australian Volunteer Briefing and Debrief (for partners and child dependants 15 years and over only)
- Expenses associated with obtaining a National Police Check (a requirement for all adult dependants)

Applying for dependant support

- At the time of application applicants are to indicate on their online application forms whether they intend to apply for Dependant Support.
- In fairness to all applicants this is the preferred opportunity to apply for this additional support. Applicants who forget to list their intention to apply for Dependant Support on their assignment application should raise the matter as quickly as possible so that their case can be considered. Volunteers can only apply for Dependant Support once per assignment.
- The budget has been divided evenly throughout the financial year, however any unspent budget from the previous month will be rolled forward into the next month.
- To be eligible, dependants must be Australian Citizens, Australian Permanent Residents, or New Zealand Citizens who are currently residing in Australia and are therefore holding a Special Category Visa (SCV). Dependants must also hold a current Medicare card.
- Each month following the interview process, the list of preferred candidates who have indicated they wish to apply for Dependant Support are evaluated and ranked based on the available budget and the below criteria.

Criteria

Essential Minimum Criteria:

- Minimum assignment duration of 12 months.
- Dependant must intend to remain in the assignment location for at least 50% of the assignment duration.

Additional Criteria, to be applied if applications exceed available funding, in order of how they will be applied:

1. Preference is given for “Hard to fill” assignment locations as determined by the Assignment Conversion Rates.
As of June 2014 these are: Kiribati, Philippines, Mongolia and Indonesia
2. Preference is given to “Remote Location” assignments as indicated on the APF.

Please note that applications for Dependant Support will not be approved if volunteers are applying for assignments in certain high risk locations. Some locations are unsuitable for dependants, particularly children. Scope Global determines these locations based on ongoing assessments of risk, security and healthcare availability.

Final decisions on dependant support rest with the Senior Manager – Volunteer Operations.

Your Volunteer Coordinator will advise you whether your application for support has been given “in principle” approval.

- Those who are selected are given “in-principle” approval subject to successfully completing the rest of the process including:
 - Copy of marriage certificate (spouse).
 - Statutory declaration (de-facto relationship) from each party attesting to the nature of the relationship stating:
 - How long you have been in the relationship.
 - How long you have been living together (date required).
 - Intention from both parties that the relationship continue indefinitely.
 - Copy of birth certificate or adoption papers (child).
 - Signed Volunteer Code of Conduct for all dependants 18 years and over.
 - Signed Child Protection Policy Declaration for all dependants 18 years and over.
 - Copy of Medicare cards for all dependants.
 - Police Check Application Form for all dependants 18 years and over.

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- First Aid Certificate (Provide First Aid HLTAID003 or its predecessor Apply First Aid HLTF311A) for all dependants 18 years and over (must be submitted prior to mobilisation). No costs associated with obtaining this certificate are covered by the program.

Those volunteers who are provided a Conditional Offer for an assignment and “in-principle” Dependant Support approval must not delay submitting the above documentation.

Special circumstances

In some special circumstances, dependant support applications may be considered after the volunteer has commenced their assignment. These circumstances may include:

- Where a spouse or de-facto partner unexpectedly ceases employment or their individual volunteer assignment, and is dependent upon the volunteer for support.
- Where a spouse or de-facto partner of a volunteer becomes an Australian citizen or Permanent Resident mid-way through the assignment.

In such circumstances, the dependant is still subject to the normal selection criteria and dependant requirements, including the limit of one Dependant Support application.

If your situation changes

In the following circumstances you are required to advise your Volunteer Coordinator and ICMT:

- Your dependant partner gains paid employment (temporary or long term)
- Your dependant child turns 18 years old and gains paid employment
- Your dependant is successful in securing their own volunteer assignment

All Dependant Support provisions including insurance, allowances and flights will be suspended while your dependant has employment. Support for your child dependants will not be affected by a partner dependant gaining employment. If your dependant then ceases to be employed, you must notify your Volunteer Coordinator by email as soon as possible to enable dependant allowances to be reassessed and potentially reinstated.

Things to consider before taking dependants on assignment

Undertaking a volunteer assignment as a single person is very different from going as a family unit. There are many advantages to volunteering as a family, however you will need to plan ahead to facilitate your family's needs in country.

Some things to consider include:

- Accommodation options – accommodation provided by HOs is generally intended for single volunteers. You will need to discuss the options available for family accommodation with the ICM and HO prior to mobilisation.
- If you have pre-school or school-age children, what options are available for care, pre-school or school? Also, what costs are involved? The program is not able to provide any financial support for schooling or childcare.
- The dependant allowance is not equal to a full volunteer allowance. How much financial support will you require while you are on assignment?
- Visa requirements:
 - What sort of visas will my family require?
 - How much time prior to my departure do I need in order to make visa arrangements for my family?

IMPORTANT: Spousal/dependant visas for de-facto partners are not available in many countries. In Country Management Teams (ICMTs) will do their best to advise on an appropriate visa option but the program does not guarantee a visa will be available (even if your partner has been granted Dependant Support).

Responsibilities of supported dependants

All dependants of volunteers supported by the Australian Volunteer program are required to adhere to the Australian Volunteers Code of Conduct. All adult dependants are also required to complete a National Police Check and First Aid Certificate before accompanying the volunteer in country. The program strongly encourages all dependants to attend the Australian Volunteer Briefing prior to mobilisation, and also a debrief event upon their return to Australia.

All supported dependants are required to adhere to the Code of Conduct (see Section 2.2). Both volunteers and supported dependants are required to undertake an In-Country Orientation (ICO). ICO includes registration with the Australian Mission responsible for your country. Dependants over 18 will also need to read Country Safety and Security Plans (CSSPs) and other documents provided by the ICM Team, and to understand their implications. ICM Teams may choose to shorten the length of ICO required for supported dependants if appropriate.

It is the responsibility of volunteers to consult with the ICM Team in order to make arrangements for childcare at ICO. This must be done in advance of mobilisation and any costs involved are the responsibility of the volunteer.

The program recommends non-supported dependants also attend the ICO and read the security plans and other documents recommended by the ICM. It is also recommended that non-supported dependants register with the Australian Mission responsible for that country and with Smart Traveller. This ensures that in the event of an evacuation, dependants are included as Australians in that country and assisted in the evacuation.

The program recognises de facto partners, including same sex couples. However, volunteers and dependants who are same sex couples should be aware that same sex relationships may not be accepted or legal in certain countries. It is important that same sex couples follow specific safety and security advice provided by the program (inc. ICM). Spousal visas for same sex partners are not available in many countries.

Upon return to Australia program-supported dependants are expected to complete a Post-Assignment Medical Assessment (Post-AMA).

Pregnancy whilst on assignment

If a volunteer or a dependant becomes pregnant whilst on assignment, the program can only provide support up until the 28th week of a pregnancy. This is due to restrictions under the insurance policy, which cannot cover volunteers or dependants for medical emergencies should complications arise after the 28th week.

The individual who is pregnant should return to Australia at or before the 28th week to ensure that both mother and baby can receive a high level of care from Australian medical facilities.

The insurance cover does not provide reimbursement for costs for routine checks during your pregnancy. The insurance policy will only cover emergency treatments for unexpected and unknown conditions which arise during and up to the 28th week of your pregnancy.