

Lived and Living Experience Workforces - University Scholarships

2026 Application Guide

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Department
of Health

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Available at [Department of Health's website](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health-workforce/mental-health-and-wellbeing-workforce-scholarship-program) <<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health-workforce/mental-health-and-wellbeing-workforce-scholarship-program>>

Scholarship program overview

The Victorian Department of Health (the department) is offering scholarships of up to \$13,000 to lived and living experience workers to contribute to the course fees for university qualifications.

This document has been prepared to guide applicants through the application process.

Who are the scholarships for?

The scholarships are for workers with a lived or living experience of mental illness or psychological distress, substance use and addiction, and families or carers employed in designated lived and living experience roles in state-funded mental health or alcohol and other drug (AOD) services, including peak bodies, training organisations and services delivered by Non-Government Organisations (NGOs).

What is the purpose of the scholarships?

The initiative has two main objectives:

- to support lived and living experience workers to attain university level qualifications to build management or leadership capability
- to support career development pathways for lived and living experience workers and improve retention in the mental health and AOD workforces.

What do the scholarships offer

Scholarships offer up to \$13,000 to contribute to university level qualifications, (Bachelor, Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Master). Applicants can use the funding to go towards course fees for a university level qualification, that they can demonstrate is aligned with their career goals and trajectory and will build their capability to perform a range of management and leaderships roles within the mental health or AOD lived and living experience sector. Up to \$3,000 scholarship funding can be used to re-imburse course-related costs such as texts books, lap-tops or child-care.

When a course does not incur course fees (eg. Research Masters, Doctorate), applicants may apply for a \$13,000 scholarship to contribute to living costs.

How do I apply?

Applicants must read and understand this guide before completing their application. To apply, please complete the application form on SHARC's [website](https://www.sharc.org.au/lived-and-living-experience-workforces-university-scholarships/).

< www.sharc.org.au/lived-and-living-experience-workforces-university-scholarships/ > by 19th November 2025. Key dates:

Activities	Date for completion
Applications open	21 October 2025
Applications close	19 November 2025
Scholarship recipients advised and agreement of terms and conditions signed	December 2025

Background

The Victorian Government has committed to implementing all recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System (the Royal Commission) and is doing so via the department's Mental Health and Wellbeing Division. Lived experience work is a central pillar of the new mental health system as envisaged by the Royal Commission. Recommendation 6 of the Royal Commission's Interim Report (2019) calls for the development and implementation of continuing learning and development pathways, educational and training opportunities, and optional qualifications for lived experience workers.

The lived and living experience university scholarship initiative is one part of the department's package of learning and development pathways for these workforces. Other initiatives available to lived and living experience workforces include flexible grants that can be used to fund TAFE level qualifications and individual or group professional development. The range of opportunities aims to ensure that lived and living experience workforces can engage in continued learning and development that is right for each individual's needs and goals.

For information about the department's full range of workforce initiatives for lived and living experience workforces, visit the department's [Workforce initiatives: lived and living experience workforces \(LLEWs\) website](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/workforce-and-training/lived-experience-workforce-initiatives) <<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/workforce-and-training/lived-experience-workforce-initiatives>>.

Scholarship program details

This initiative offers scholarships for university level qualifications to lived and living experience workers employed in designated roles across state funded mental health and AOD services. These scholarships are designed to support lived and living experience workers to build their management and leadership skills and capability. The initiative is open to lived and living experience leaders from early stage and aspiring leaders right through to experienced and senior leaders.

The terms 'leadership' and 'management' have varying definitions and meanings. To support understanding in this context, the [Lived Experience Leadership: Rebooting the DNA of leadership](https://lexmovement.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/LEx-Report-Final-2.pdf) <<https://lexmovement.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/LEx-Report-Final-2.pdf>> report provides the following definition for lived experience leadership and management: "change-makers, innovators and leaders who have activated their lived expertise to inform, shape and lead their work to directly benefit the community".

Scholarship administration

Scholarships are administered by The Collective consortia at SHARC, and information about scholarship programs can be accessed on [SHARC's website](http://www.sharc.org.au/lived-and-living-experience-workforces-university-scholarships/). <www.sharc.org.au/lived-and-living-experience-workforces-university-scholarships/>. The Collective can also be contacted directly for any queries about eligibility or to offer support with the application process. Phone, (03) 9573 1700 or contact scholarships@sharc.org.au.

If your queries are not resolved through The Collective in the first instance, please contact livedexperienceworkforce@health.vic.gov.au for support.

Supporting growth of lived and living experience roles in management and leadership

The new mental health system as envisaged by the Royal Commission will increase the number of roles for lived and living experience workers across all parts of the mental health system. As reform is taking place across the system, there is increasing demand for the expansion of lived and living experience workers to undertake management and leadership roles. This includes roles spanning service design and delivery, service and system leadership, research and evaluation, system governance, accountability, and oversight. This scholarship program aims to support lived and living experience workers to build the necessary capability, in addition to their existing skills and lived or living experience expertise, to confidently take on diverse leadership roles across the system.

Who can apply?

The scholarships are available to lived and living experience workers employed in designated roles to complete a university level qualification to build their leadership and management capability. This includes:

- new course enrolment - enrolment to start new a university qualification
- current students - support individuals that are currently enrolled in a university qualification.

Applicants can study in a way that suits them, for example part time or full time, in person or remotely. This initiative aims to be as accessible as possible, and police checks or similar will not be required to receive a scholarship.

Eligibility criteria

Applicants must meet the following eligibility criteria.

- Be employed in a state funded mental health or AOD service including peak bodies, training organisations and services delivered by NGOs.
- Be employed in a designated lived or living experience role. Designated lived experience roles include all positions, that regardless of the position type or setting, require lived experience of mental illness or psychological distress, substance use or addiction, or of being a family member or carer.
- Be an Australian citizen or permanent resident or New Zealand citizen.
- Be eligible to enrol in, or already be enrolled in, a university level qualification for semester 1 2026 (i.e. bachelor's degree, graduate certificate, graduate diploma, masters, or doctorate).
- Be able to provide a letter of recommendation from line-manger and/or lived/living experience senior (if relevant), confirming the applicant's length of engagement in the sector and how the service will support the applicant's learning (e.g., through study leave, flexible workload, etc). Please use [template](#) provided.

Which courses are eligible?

University level courses that build management and leadership skills are eligible for funding. To be awarded a scholarship, candidates must demonstrate their commitment to the lived and living experience workforces and describe how the proposed course will support them to use their lived or

living experience perspective across leadership or management roles in the mental health and wellbeing or AOD sector. For example, in leadership, management or change management roles.

Funding is available to support lived and living experience workers to complete university level qualifications in Family Therapy (for example, a Graduate Certificate of Counselling Child Youth and Family Therapy or a Master of Clinical Family Therapy). Applicants will need to demonstrate a clear connection to family/carer leadership and skill development in their application to meet the requirements of this initiative.

Currently there are not any lived or living experience specific university courses offered by Australian-based universities. However, applications from candidates wishing to complete higher degrees by research focussed on lived or living experience research topics are encouraged.

These scholarships are not designed to support lived and living experience workers to qualify as mental health clinicians. As such, funding is not available for degrees in clinical disciplines (for example, nursing, social work, occupational therapy).

Areas of study that applicants could consider include (but are not limited to):

- leadership
- education and training
- research and evaluation
- training and assessment
- change management
- finance and administration
- policy and governance
- health services management
- project management
- family therapy
- creative expression: including arts, music, theatre, spirituality (if can be linked to leadership development)

The following courses are examples of eligible university level qualifications.

- *Leadership* - Graduate Certificate in Healthcare Leadership, Master of Leadership, Graduate Diploma in Health Leadership and Management
- *Management/Business* - Graduate Certificate in Business Administration, Graduate Certificate in Health Management, Graduate Diploma of Health Management, Graduate Certificate in Entrepreneurship,
- *Education* – Graduate Certificate of Educational Design, Master of Health Professions Education, Master of Education (Research).
- *Health Services Management* – Master/Doctorate of Public Health, Bachelor of Human Resource Management, Master of Health Administration
- *Law* – Juris Doctor
- *Family Therapy* – Graduate Certificate of Counselling Child Youth and Family Therapy, Master of Clinical Family Therapy
- *Policy and Governance* – Australian Institute of Company Directors – Company of Directors Course, Boardroom Mastery

This is not an exhaustive list. Applicants are encouraged to apply for any course that will contribute to their leadership development in the lived and living experience workforce excluding those that are for non-lived experience clinical disciplines.

How much funding is available?

Scholarships of up to \$13,000 (and no more than 90 percent of the value of the qualification) will be available to contribute to the course fees of any eligible university course. A co-contribution will therefore be required.

For eligible international courses, scholarships of up to \$13,000 converted to the Australian dollar (and no more than 90 percent of the value of the qualification) will be available.

For research degrees that do not incur costs, applicants who are not receiving a scholarship through another funder, are also eligible to apply for a \$13,000 scholarship to cover living expenses.

Up to \$3,000 of the scholarship funding can be awarded to re-imburse course-related costs, for example, text books, lap-tops or child-care.

Depending on the number of applications received, larger scholarships may be available. Please make sure, when applying, to indicate the full course costs associated with your chosen qualification.

What is the selection process?

A panel, led by lived and living experience advisors, will assess all eligible applications based on the selection criteria. The panel will then score applications to identify scholarship recipients.

Selection criteria

Applicants will be asked to complete a statement between 100 and 200-words addressing each of the following criteria:

1. Describe your experience in the mental health or AOD sectors in lived or living experience roles (consider all relevant experience including paid, unpaid, or partly paid engagements).
2. What is your experience of LLE leadership? (draw on the skills, experience and values you bring from your LLE perspective).
3. Briefly describe the course you have proposed and how it will contribute to building your leadership capability and opportunities within the mental health or AOD lived and living experience workforce.
4. Describe your professional goals and how you wish to contribute to the mental health or AOD lived and living experience workforce in the future.

Weighting

Applicants working at a service delivery location situated in regional or rural Victoria, as well as those who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, will be prioritised.

Tips to support your scholarship application

1. **Know the key dates.** The scholarship applications will close on 19th November 2025 and late applications will not be considered.
2. **Review the selection criteria a few times.** Applicants should familiarise themselves with the selection criteria and spend some time thinking about how they satisfy each one.
3. **Use past experiences as examples.** Applicants are encouraged to share their diverse leadership experience and specific examples about how they meet each criterion (not limited to paid roles in the mental health or AOD sector). This can include examples of projects or pieces of work that applicants have led or contributed to that have informed, shaped, or resulted in change. Applicants are encouraged to draw on the diverse leadership experiences and skills they may have demonstrated in professional and community settings. For example, co-production, co-design, research, peer support, community development, media, training, organising, writing, activism, artistic expression, policy, managing teams, coordinating programs, etc.
4. **Spend some time refining written responses.** Keep responses to selection criteria as concise as possible noting the word limits are between 100 and 200-words. Remember to use examples to demonstrate strengths, and passion and commitment to the mental health or alcohol and other drugs lived experience sectors.
5. **Reach out for support.** The Collective at SHARC can be contacted directly for any queries or to offer support with the application process. Phone, (03) 9573 1700 or email scholarships@sharc.org.au.
6. **What happens after selection?**

The Collective will notify applicants of the outcome of their application via email by late December 2025.

Scholarship recipients

Scholarship recipients will be required to provide The Collective with evidence via supporting documents to begin receiving funds (including the letter of recommendation from your service, evidence of previous university qualifications if relevant, proof of enrolment in a postgraduate course at an accredited university, and proof of Australian citizenship, permanent residency, or New Zealand citizenship).

Once the required evidence has been provided to The Collective, scholarship recipients will receive funds for semester 1, 2026 units via a direct electronic transfer to their account following the census date. Scholarship recipients may defer their enrolment once.

Funding will be disbursed to the recipient incrementally based on evidence of enrolment for each semester. Evidence of the completion of prior funded units will be required before The Collective can pay a recipient for additional units.

The department may contact scholarship recipients for participation in promotional activities.

Responsibilities, conditions and commitments for scholarship recipients

The following provides a high-level overview of recipients' responsibilities, conditions and commitments; however, The Collective will provide a more comprehensive statement to scholarship recipients.

Applicants are responsible for ensuring that they have read this guide, obtained employer support and compiled all necessary documentation before applying. Applicants should ensure that their application meets the eligibility requirements detailed in this guide.

Late applications will not be accepted.

To receive the next instalment of their funding, recipients must provide evidence of enrolment and completion of units.

Scholarship recipients are responsible for enrolling and paying course fees (or deferring fees) or HECS-HELP by the due date and are responsible for debts incurred in the course of study including FEE-HELP and HECS-HELP loans. More information about FEE-HELP and HECS-HELP is available at the Commonwealth Government's [Study Assist website \(studyassist.gov.au\)](https://www.studyassist.gov.au) <<https://www.studyassist.gov.au>>.

Scholarships may be classed as taxable income depending on your financial situation. Please note the department cannot provide advice to applicants/recipients about taxation. For further information consult your taxation agent or visit Australian Taxation Office website [Is my scholarship taxable? | Australian Taxation Office \(ato.gov.au\)](https://www.ato.gov.au/calculators-and-tools/is-my-scholarship-taxable?) <[https://www.ato.gov.au/calculators-and-tools/is-my-scholarship-taxable](https://www.ato.gov.au/calculators-and-tools/is-my-scholarship-taxable?)>.

It is expected that recipients intend to remain in employment within the Victorian public or NGO mental health sector or public AOD sector, following the completion of the postgraduate course.

The department may contact scholarship recipients for the purpose of administering or coordinating the LLEW scholarships program and for participation in promotional activities. This includes for the purposes of program evaluation, review or improvement activities.

Deferment

Recipients must notify The Collective within 14 business days of the change in study arrangements. Recipients may defer studies for a maximum of one year and retain their scholarship. Deferments longer than one year will require the funds to be returned to the scholarship provider.

Withdrawal from course

Recipients must notify The Collective within 14 business days of withdrawal from their course of study. All or part of scholarship money may be required to be returned as determined by the department on a case-by-case basis. Students are encouraged to be aware of their university's fees policy as most universities will not refund course fees if the student withdraws or defers after the census date.