



## **Financial Hardship Policy**

### **Introduction**

This Financial Hardship Policy explains how GOCSA supports clients who may be struggling to meet their service fees. The organisation is committed to ensuring clients are treated with dignity and are offered appropriate options to maintain access to essential services during periods of financial difficulty.

### **Source of Obligation**

The Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) requires service providers to have a financial hardship policy.

Under the Aged Care Act 2024 (effective 1 November 2025) and associated rules, providers delivering services under CHSP or other funded aged-care programs must maintain:

- a publicly available client contribution (fee) policy, and
- a publicly available financial hardship policy that explains how fee waivers or reductions may be requested, assessed and granted.

### **Policy Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to outline how GOCSA assists clients who are experiencing financial hardship and may be unable to meet their fee obligations, while ensuring that hardship requests are managed consistently, fairly, and in a way that supports the long-term financial viability and governance of GOCSA, as required under the new financial and prudential standards.



## **Financial Hardship Policy**

### **Policy Statement**

GOCSA recognises that clients may face financial stress from time to time. GOCSA is dedicated to working collaboratively with clients to understand their circumstances and, where appropriate, offer temporary or ongoing relief.

This policy applies to services delivered by GOCSA under the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) and Fee for Service (FFS).

Support at Home Client Co-Contributions are not included; clients must adhere to the procedures outlined by Services Australia when applying for hardship under that program.

GOCSA will ensure the policy is publicly available (on our website or printed on request) and provided to all new and existing clients before service commencement.

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### **Principles**

#### **Fairness and Respect**

Each request will be reviewed individually and confidentially.

#### **Sustainability**

Hardship decisions will balance client needs with the organisation's capacity to maintain services.

#### **Accessibility**

Clients will be given clear and simple information on how to apply for hardship support.

#### **Client Needs**

Where hardship is approved, Coordinators and Care Partners will work with clients to ensure services continue in alignment with their care plans.



## **Financial Hardship Policy**

### **Scope**

This policy applies to all GOCSA staff involved in fee administration, client intake, financial assessment, and service delivery under CHSP or other GOCSA-managed programs.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

<b>Role</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>Chief Financial Officer</b>	Ensures overall implementation of this policy and compliance with regulatory requirements under Aged Care Act / Financial & Prudential Standards.
<b>Finance Manager</b>	Reviews and approves financial hardship applications for both clinic-based and in-home services; ensures decisions are consistent with policy and re-assesses hardship arrangements periodically. Escalates unresolved or disputed cases to the COO.
<b>Coordinators / Care Partners</b>	Inform clients about their contribution obligations, provide hardship policy information to clients at intake and when fees change, support clients to apply if they are having payment difficulties, collect hardship applications and forward to the Finance Manager, and monitor service plans with hardship adjustments.
<b>Chief Operating Officer (COO)</b>	Reviews escalated disputes where clients disagree with hardship determinations, ensures a fair internal review process, and ensures policy is applied consistently.



## **Financial Hardship Policy**

### **Definitions**

Financial Hardship – A situation where a client, due to circumstances beyond their control (e.g. low income, limited assets, unexpected expenses), is unable to meet fee or contribution obligations by the due date without causing significant financial strain.

### **Procedure**

#### **1. Application Process**

- Clients who believe they are unable to pay fees on time should be given a copy of the GOCSA “Claim for Fee Reduction / Fee Waiver Form”.
- Clients must submit the completed form, along with evidence to support hardship (e.g. income and assets details, essential expense statements, documentation of unexpected hardship or adverse events). This aligns with requirements under the new Aged Care Rules for hardship application.
- Staff should assist clients to complete the form if necessary and explain what evidence is acceptable.

#### **2. Assessment and Decision-making**

- The Finance Manager reviews all applications using the criteria in this policy, including capacity to pay (income/assets), essential expenses, and any other relevant circumstances (e.g. unexpected hardship). This mirrors the approach used by Services Australia for hardship assistance.
- If hardship is approved, GOCSA may:
  1. Waive fees completely; or
  2. Reduce contributions; or
  3. Temporarily suspend fees until further review.
- The decision must be communicated in writing to the client, including the duration of the waiver/reduction, the next review date, and any obligations (e.g., reporting changes in circumstances).
- The policy must also specify the method for calculating reductions or waivers (for example, full waiver vs partial – depending on income/assets/expenses) in a clear, fair and consistent manner.



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### **3. Review Period**

- Any hardship arrangement granted will be reviewed at least every 6 months, or earlier if the client's financial circumstances change or the broader aged-care fee rules/thresholds change (e.g. as CPI-indexed thresholds are updated).
- Clients must notify GOCSA if their financial situation changes (improves or worsens) before the following scheduled review.

### **4. Limits and Caps**

- GOCSA reserves the right to limit the total amount or duration of fee waivers or reductions per client, if necessary, to ensure the ongoing sustainability of the service. Any such limits must be applied consistently, transparently, and in accordance with fairness and capacity to pay principles.

GOCSA must record and monitor amounts waived or reduced due to hardship for internal governance and reporting purposes. This ensures compliance with financial and prudential standards.

### **5. Interaction with Government Hardship Assistance**

- When clients are eligible for the government's hardship assistance schemes (such as through Services Australia), GOCSA will support and encourage them to apply. If approved, the subsidy will be paid to GOCSA on behalf of the client, covering all or part of the contributions, fees, or charges.
- Until GOCSA receives confirmation of subsidy approval, GOCSA may temporarily suspend collection of client contributions for Support at Home clients under assessment (if appropriate), in accordance with guidance. GOCSA will continue to comply with reporting and contribution frameworks under CHSP as required.

### **6. Dispute Resolution**



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- Clients who disagree with the hardship determination must submit a written request for internal review within 7 days of receiving the decision.
- The Finance Manager will escalate disputes to the COO for review. If still dissatisfied, clients may follow the process set out in the GOCSA Feedback and Complaints Policy (available publicly).
- GOCSA commits to a timely review and response to disputes (e.g. within 14 days of escalation).

### **Publication and Accessibility**

- This policy will be published on the GOCSA website
- All new and existing clients will be provided with clear, written information about their fees and given access to both the client contribution policy and this hardship policy at intake.

### **Governance and Compliance**

- GOCSA will maintain records of all hardship applications, decisions, waivers/reductions granted, and periodic reviews.
- The organisation will ensure ongoing compliance with the new financial and prudential standards under the Aged Care Act.
- The policy will be reviewed regularly — at least annually — to ensure alignment with legislative and regulatory changes (including updated thresholds, means-testing criteria, and guidance from regulators).

### **Effective Date**

This policy is effective as of 1 November 2025, coinciding with the commencement of the Aged Care Act 2024 and associated rules.