

3 December 2015

Multi Purpose Taxi Program
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Melbourne VIC 8060

Multi Purpose Taxi Program Review

Carers Victoria provides this feedback on behalf of carers and the people they care for living in Victoria. Accessible and affordable transport is of crucial importance to supporting and sustaining informal care of people living in the community. The current Multi Purpose Taxi Program (MPTP) provides much needed support not only to Victorians with limited mobility, but to their family and friend carers. Carers are both providers and key facilitators of transport services for the people they care for, and indirect beneficiaries of the program as they travel with a person with limited mobility to support them with access to medical appointments and other necessary travel.

About carers

Undertaking a caring role can impact financially on carers and the people they care for. Carers are more likely than non-carers to have low household incomes with 65% of primary carers with incomes in the lowest 40% of households compared with 36% of non-carers. (ABS, Survey of Disability Ageing and Carers, 2012). Thus the cost of transport is a key factor in carers' decision making about choice of travel mode and can be a significant barrier to community access. The transport subsidy provided by the MPTP provides an important household as well as individual benefit.

Some primary carers¹ themselves have limited mobility. Primary carers are significantly more likely than the general population to have a disability, with around one third of primary carers having a disability (37%), compared with 16% of people living in households who were not in a caring role. (ABS, Survey of Disability Ageing and Carers, 2012). It is important that all Victorians with limited mobility, including people with caring roles are provided with access to this Program.

Recognising and supporting carers

The Victorian Carers Recognition Act (2012) defines a carer as anyone who provides unpaid care to another person in a care relationship, where the person being cared for is an older person, or a person with a disability, a mental illness or an ongoing medical condition.

As the Taxi Services Commission is an organisation funded by government that is responsible for developing or providing policies, programs or services that affect people in care relationships, the Taxi Services Commission should ensure that any changes to the MPTP do not disadvantage people in care relationships.

Improvement opportunities

Carers Victoria supports a number of areas of improvement to the MPTP that have been identified in the discussion paper, including:

Program eligibility criteria and integration with public transport

Carers Victoria strongly supports amendment of the eligibility criteria to not exclude the use of public transport. We also strongly support the proposal that program users qualify for fully subsidised public transport such as people who are legally blind currently qualify for the Vision Impaired Travel Pass.

¹ Primary carers are carers who provide the majority of ongoing informal assistance.

However, we have reviewed the South Australian medical assessment criteria cited in the discussion paper and are concerned that the examples relate only to physical mobility issues and are not inclusive of people with cognitive impairment who need to use the program. Carers are most concerned that any changes to assessing mobility limitations do not disadvantage people with a range of disabilities that impair their capacity to use transport safely and independently even though they may have no physical mobility limitations at all.

Group travel

The discussion paper states that people with limited mobility often travel together to a common destination or to attend group activities, but does not indicate what data this is based on. Carers of people with disability who currently use taxis to attend employment at an Australian Disability Enterprise (ADE) or an Adult Training Support Service (ATSS) would support group travel arrangement that result in cheaper fares. We note however, that as the NDIS rolls out, participants who have funded transport include in their individual plans will have their Centrelink Mobility Allowance cancelled. It is unclear how the proposed shared arrangements for transport would intersect with individualised funding programs such as the NDIS.

Carers Victoria supports a fair and equitable approach to fare-sharing when program users travel together, as well as when program users travel with non-program users. In particular we note that it will be important to ensure that any travel sharing arrangements that are put in place do not disadvantage carers who are not program users travelling with the person they care for who is a program user, i.e. they should not be charged separately.

Wheelchair journeys

Carers Victoria notes the ongoing issues and feedback from wheelchair users and their carers regarding lack of availability of wheelchair accessible vehicles at the times required. Broadening the MPTP to enable program users to use funds for transport services beyond taxis, such as pre-booked hire cars and community transport buses, would give people more options to better meet their transport needs. Ways of expanding services able to provide transport for wheelchair users include market-based mechanisms utilising new technology and providing financial incentives for the acquisition of wheelchair accessible vehicles and the prioritisation of wheelchair users over multi-passenger bookings.

Transformation of the MPTP into a true Multi Purpose *Transport* Program would support all people with limited mobility and their carers to make use of a broad range of transport options, improving equity with other Victorians without mobility limitations.

Transparency

It is apparent that many existing program users and their carers are misinformed about the parameters of the program and that some potentially eligible people have not even applied for the program. Carers Victoria supports more accessible information provision and making publically available data on the program and how it is used. In addition Carers Victoria recommends that carers supporting or accompanying program users should be able to complain about their own treatment by taxi drivers or MPTP staff within the Commission.

Renewal and identification

Carers Victoria suggests aligning the renewal process to those that currently apply to VicRoads motor vehicle drivers' licences with options for 10 year or three year renewal. We question the necessity for photo identification as we are not aware of any evidence of fraudulent use of the MPTP and acquiring photo identification could be burdensome for programs users and carers. However, if photo identification is introduced we suggest there will be a need to improve access of program users to existing infrastructure such as VicRoads photo points.

Merits based review panel and annual limit extension

Factors that should be considered when an applicant does not entirely meet the formal eligibility criteria or an existing user seeks additional subsidy include:

- Changes to a person's access to informal supports e.g. a primary carer who can no longer drive the person around
- The need to access employment or regular medical treatment
- People living in rural/regional and outer suburban areas with very limited access to public transport options.

Complementary initiatives

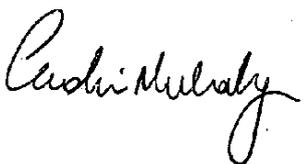
Access point and support for older drivers

Carers Victoria supports the concept of a single access point to information about mobility related services but notes that these type of initiatives are often challenging to implement in practice. The concept of a single access point to information about mobility related services including but not limited to VicRoads information about driving with a disability, medical conditions and licence restrictions, and the Victorian Disabled Persons Parking Scheme could be of benefit to program users and their carers. For example, drivers of any age who have their licence to drive restricted, suspended or cancelled due to a medical condition should automatically receive information about access to public transport for people with disability and the MPTP.

Carers Victoria agrees that age should not be a determining factor for eligibility for the MPTP. However, we do support the provision of information about eligibility for the MPTP to drivers of any age who have had their licence suspended or cancelled as a result of fitness to drive assessments. This could be an important function of the access point in bringing together access to all transport related information for all Victorians with mobility limitations and their carers.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this brief feedback on behalf of Victorian carers. If you have any questions or would like us to elaborate on any points, please contact Anne Muldowney, Policy Advisor anne.muldowney@carersvictoria.org.au.

Yours sincerely



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