



ACT
Government



ACT Emergency Services Agency

Volunteer Firefighter Payment **Guidelines**

2019-2020

*“Working together to care & protect through cohesive operations,
collaborative management and a unified executive”*

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Volunteer Firefighter Payment – Guideline 2019-2020

1. Overview

On 8 January 2020, the Commonwealth Government agreed to the Australian Capital Territory's request for relief payments for ACT volunteer firefighters. These payments are funded by the Commonwealth Government. The ACT Government is administering the Australian Government's Volunteer Firefighters' Financial Support Program, which is designed to help volunteer firefighters who have been called out for more than 10 days since 1 July 2019.

The purpose of the volunteer relief payments is to support volunteers involved in firefighting activities, who have contributed significant personal time assisting with the national bushfire crisis around the country and who have lost income as a result of volunteering to fight the fires.

The volunteer firefighter payment is for **eligible volunteer firefighters** who are self-employed or employed by small and medium businesses and have lost income.

An eligible volunteer may claim up to \$300 of lost income per day, after the first 10 days and up to a maximum of \$6000 in the 2019–2020 financial year.

2. Eligibility

An individual may be eligible for funding if they:

- are a volunteer who is registered with the ACT Rural Fire Service (ACT RFS) or ACT State Emergency Service (ACT SES).
- have been volunteering as part of an operational response to bushfires for more than 10 days since 1 July 2019. The days do not need to be consecutive.
- are self-employed or employed by a small or medium business (a business with an annual turnover of less than \$50 million in the 2018–2019 financial year), and
- have lost income as a result of volunteering during the 2019-2020 financial year.

ACT volunteers deployed interstate as part of an operational response to bushfires can count those days towards payments through this package.
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Applicants are **not eligible** if they work for:

- a large business. Large businesses have more capacity to support their staff to help the community and are being encouraged to do so.
- government (state, federal or local). Applicants are encouraged to talk to their employer about special leave provisions.

Applicants are *likely* not eligible if they:

- are a retiree (that is, someone who is not earning income).

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- their involvement is in non-operational activities such as catering support or as a brigade support member.

Eligible volunteer activities include:

- firefighting, airbase operations, airbase management, staging area management, equipment officers, peer support officers, community educators, and IMT members.
- Interstate deployments for operational bushfire response.
- reasonable travel and recovery time.

Ineligible volunteer activities include:

- catering support and brigade support members.
- training or participating in non-emergency operations (for example, hazard reduction burns).

3. Applications

How to apply

- Volunteers can apply by visiting www.esa.gov.au and completing an expression of interest as the first stage.
- Volunteers will then be requested to complete an application form – this form will also be available online.

What information is needed to apply

For initial Expression of Interests, applicants will be asked to provide:

- personal and contact details,
- Membership number
- Number of days being claimed for loss of income
- And to answer a few questions to establish likely eligibility

At the Application Form stage applicants will be asked to provide:

1. personal and contact details (name, date of birth, address, email and phone number)
2. Volunteer agency name and member number
3. Name of the fires and deployment details (dates being claimed and brigade, district or SES unit name)
4. number of days being for loss of income

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5. amount being claimed for each day
6. evidence of lost income if claiming more than \$200 on any day
7. bank account details for payment.

An applicant can submit more than one application until they reach the \$6000 cap for the 2019–2020 financial year. There is no limit to the number of applications that can be made.

Example

An application could be made totalling \$4000 in March for days worked up until that time, and then a second application submitted in May for \$1000 for days worked in April, and so on until the \$6000 cap is reached.

Indicative Timing

Volunteering Period	1 July 2019 – 30 June 2020
Expressions of Interest Open	21 February 2020
Applications Open	6 March 2020
Payments Commence	19 March 2020
Application Period Closes	31 July 2020

Information & Record Keeping

By submitting an application, the applicant is providing personal information. The use of the personal information is only for the function for which it has been transferred and complies with the limitations under the [Information Privacy Act 2009](#).

Applicants must retain relevant documentary evidence to support their claim, which can be provide upon a request for audit validation.

4. Volunteers - Frequently Asked Questions

Who does it apply to?

The package applies to eligible ACT volunteers, who are self-employed or employed by small or medium-sized businesses and incurred a financial loss of income from volunteering in the prolonged and extensive bushfire response during 2019-20.

Eligible volunteers need to have served at least 10 days to claim and can then claim for lost income for each day of volunteering over the 10 days minimum. Eligible volunteers can claim up to a total of \$6,000 (with a daily limit of up to \$200 without evidence, or \$300 with evidence).

What evidence do I need to demonstrate my income loss?

If you are claiming less than \$200 per day, you do not need any evidence of loss of income. If you are claiming more than \$200 per day, you will need to provide evidence, to support your claim of loss of income, for example:

- evidence of your actual roster for the period you were unable to work, given your volunteering or
- an average of prior work period rosters or payslips, which would be indicative for the period you volunteered or
- a declaration from your accountant outlining their assessment of your net lost income from the period you volunteered.

This evidence needs to be kept for five years and provided on request for audit validation.

I've volunteered for multiple bushfires. How do I calculate the number of days I've volunteered for?

If you volunteer for any duration of time, on any calendar day, it is considered as one day of service. The 10 days minimum service does not have to be consecutive days and can be for different bushfire events.

I volunteered to fight bushfires in other states. Does this count?

Yes – if you served as an eligible volunteer, your time deployed interstate can count towards your 10 day minimum. If you served interstate after reaching the 10 day minimum, you can count these days towards your claim for loss of income.

Can I apply more than once?

Yes. You can apply more than once if you volunteer for further, eligible bushfire support. You will already have met the 10 days minimum service period for the first eligible claim.

Eligible volunteers can access up to a total of \$6000 per person for the 2019-2020 financial year.

How will I receive my payment?

You will be asked in the Application Form to provide your bank account details and payments will be made through electronic funds transfer.

Payments are not subject to income tax – they will not be included on a payment summary.

Will volunteers from other states, who helped in the ACT, be eligible?

Interstate volunteers who supported ACT bushfire response activities must apply through the Volunteer Firefighters Compensation Package in their own state or territory, if available.

I have taken paid annual recreation, sick or long service leave to volunteer. Am I eligible?

Yes. If you have partly or fully used these leave entitlements to undertake volunteer activities, you are eligible to claim them as lost income, once you've completed 10 days of minimum service. You can claim up to \$200 per day without evidence, or \$300 per day. You will need to provide evidence of the leave entitlements you used for the days you volunteered.

Why can't volunteers who work for large businesses receive the payment?

Larger businesses have more capacity to support their staff and are encouraged to do so in the same way their volunteer staff have supported their community.

Why aren't other volunteers eligible?

The Volunteer Firefighters Compensation Package is to support eligible ACT volunteers who have been directly involved in firefighting bushfires on a fire ground or providing direct operational support to bushfire response activities.

I've volunteered for 17 days to date. How many days can I claim?

To be eligible for the payment, you must have initially volunteered for 10 calendar days, carrying out approved activities. You can then claim for the days over the 10-day minimum, that you lost income. If you were not rostered to work on the extra days you volunteered, you cannot claim that as lost income.

The amount you claim for each day, will be different, depending on how many hours you were rostered on for and the income you would have received.

You can only claim for days you have already volunteered. You cannot claim for days in advance, for example a rostered period that you have not yet worked. If you volunteer in the future, you can submit another claim, however each volunteer is only entitled to a maximum of \$6000.

I volunteer for both the Rural Fire Service (RFS) and State Emergency Service (SES). Can I combine my service for both?

The time you have spent volunteering for both the RFS and SES can be combined to make up your 10 day minimum, so long as it involved eligible firefighting and operational support activities. You can also claim the time you volunteered for either service if you lost income as a result.

I'm retired, on a disability pension, or currently looking for work. Why can't I claim it?

The Volunteer Firefighters Compensation Package is designed to support volunteers who have incurred a financial loss of income as a direct result of volunteering. Volunteers who are retired, on Centrelink payments, or currently looking for work, do not qualify as they have not suffered a financial loss from forgoing paid work.

Examples of Calculations

A day of service means any 24-hour period (12:00am to 11:59pm) where you volunteered as part of an operational response to bushfires. This includes weekends.

There is no minimum or maximum amount of time you need to serve on a day of service. If you start a shift before midnight and finish the next day, you can claim both days (if you lost potential income on both days).

You cannot claim for the first 10 days of volunteering. You can claim payment for each day you've volunteered from **day 11** and any following days.

The days do not need to be consecutive.

Example 1

Ahmed has volunteered for 17 days as part of an operational response to bushfires. He had the potential to work in his carpentry business on all 17 of these days. He deducts 10 (non-claimable days) from his total of 17 volunteer days. He claims 7 days.

The amount you receive is the number of days you volunteered from day 11, paid at your average net daily income (up to a maximum of \$300 per day). Total payments are capped at \$6000.

Examples 2 & 3

Gary works 30 days as a volunteer firefighter. His normal income is \$400 per day. Gary is eligible for 20 days at \$300 per day; a total of \$6000.

Cindy works 25 days as a volunteer firefighter. Her normal income is \$200 per day. Cindy is eligible for 15 days at \$200 per day; a total of \$3000.

Luke works 45 days as a volunteer firefighter. His normal income is \$200 per day. Luke is eligible for 30 days at \$200 per day, which reaches the cap of \$6000.

If your daily income varies, you need to calculate your average net daily income. To do this, add up your income over the days you would have worked and divide it by the number of days.

Example 4

Sally's daily income is \$200 but she receives \$300 (time-and-a-half) on weekends. She is claiming payment for a Sunday, a Monday and a Tuesday. Sally adds together her daily income (after tax) which equals \$700. She then divides \$700 by the number of days she worked (3 days). Sally's 'average net daily income' across the 3 days is \$233.33; rounded up to \$234.

If you're self-employed, enter your average net daily income loss to the best of your knowledge. If you need more help, we suggest you speak with your accountant or the ATO.

You can claim up to \$200 per day without providing written evidence for your claim. If you claim \$201–300 per day, you may be asked to provide written evidence in the form of payslips or previous tax statements.

I am a casual or part-time worker and work different hours across the financial year. How do I calculate my lost income?

You should look at the hours you would have worked on the days you volunteered and claim the lost income for those hours. If you have earned less than \$300 on a particular day, you can only claim for the amount you lost. If you have earned more than \$300, you can only claim \$300 as the daily maximum.

For example, Jane has volunteered for 15 days, in an eligible role, so can claim lost income for the 5 additional days she volunteered. Jane was only rostered on for 3 of those days, and her net income would have been \$150 on day 1, \$250 on day 2 and \$400 on day 3.

She can only claim \$700 as the daily limit is \$300, so she can't claim the full \$400 for day 3 - $\$150 + \$250 + \$300 = \700 .

I am a primary producer. How do I calculate my income?

Primary producers can claim \$200 per eligible day of service, regardless of their recent income history, in recognition of the ongoing impact the drought is having on rural incomes. If you want to claim between \$200 and \$300, you will need evidence to support your claim.