



WDO

Unpaid Fines and Work and Development Orders

Legal Aid
NEW SOUTH WALES

ALS
Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited

Are some of your clients struggling to pay off fines?

Unpaid fines can really hurt. They can result in increasing debt, loss of driver licence and car registration, a portion of wages being taken by the State Debt Recovery Office (SDRO) or property being taken by the Sheriff.

For people who are unable to pay, fines debt can also impact on their health and wellbeing, their relationships and their ability to find employment. It can even lead to further offending and prison.

Now there is a simple and practical way to support people to be free of their unpaid fines and the negative consequences that go with them.

What is a Work and Development Order (WDO)?

WDOs allow people to clear their fines through unpaid work, courses or treatment. WDOs are made by the SDRO. A person can only get a WDO if their application is supported by an "approved organisation" or an "approved registered health practitioner".

As soon as a WDO is approved all enforcement action stops and licence sanctions are lifted.

Who is eligible for a WDO?

The WDO scheme is available to anyone who is having trouble paying off their fines because they are homeless, have a mental illness, intellectual disability or cognitive impairment, serious addiction to drugs, alcohol or volatile substances or because they are experiencing acute economic hardship.

"The ability for clients to undertake activities to work towards satisfying their debt is motivating...It's a double win for the client. They get to work off their debt without being further financially compromised and they are more receptive to valuable interventions to address their significant barriers."

WDO provider

What sort of activities can be undertaken by WDO participants?

The scheme is very broad and many different activities can be undertaken as part of a WDO. They include:

- Unpaid voluntary work
- Medical or mental health treatment
- Educational, vocational or life skills courses
- Counselling and therapy
- Financial counselling
- Drug and alcohol treatment
- Mentoring programs (if under 25)
- Case management
- Any combination of these activities

Fines are worked off at different rates depending on the activity. For example, unpaid work reduces the debt by \$30 for every hour worked. A medical or mental health treatment plan, or drug and alcohol treatment, will reduce the debt by up to \$1000 a month, as long as the client complies with the plan.

Unpaid Fines and Work and Development Orders

How can our organisation get involved?

The best thing your organisation can do to help clients with fines debt is to become an approved organisation or approved registered health practitioner. So that more clients benefit from the scheme your organisation can apply for approval on behalf of all the services within your organisation.

You may in fact already be providing services and activities that would satisfy the WDO criteria. Or you may be case managing clients who are undertaking eligible activities with other service providers.

Signing up is a quick and simple process. Reporting and record keeping requirements are minimal and straightforward.

If you want to become an approved WDO provider contact the NSW Department of Attorney General and Justice on (02) 8688 8099 or email wdo@agd.nsw.gov.au for an application form.

“This is my chance to be a cleanskin. It all balances on the WDO. It means my life.”

WDO participant

What do approved organisations have to do?

Here's what approved organisations need to do if they are supporting a WDO client:

Step 1:

Assess whether the client is eligible for the WDO Scheme

Step 2:

Develop an appropriate activity or treatment plan with the client

Step 3:

Contact the WDO Hotline on 1300 478 879 to validate the client's details and receive an enforcement number to be entered into the SDRO online portal

Step 4:

Provide and/or supervise activities or treatment undertaken by the client

Step 5:

Keep records required by the SDRO eg. documents that support your client's eligibility, a copy of their WDO application and details of their compliance with the WDO activity

Step 6:

Complete a monthly report on the client's progress via the SDRO's online portal

What if my client can't or isn't eligible to do a WDO?

Unless your client contacts the SDRO and makes alternative arrangements to resolve their fines debt, further enforcement action is highly likely. You should contact the SDRO to discuss the options available for your client.

Want more information?

Legal Aid NSW WDO Service

Central West region

Francesca Ciantar,
WDO Solicitor, (02) 9219 6328 or 0409 718 131
francesca.ciantar@legalaid.nsw.gov.au

Ellie MacDonald, WDO Support, (02) 9601 1200 or
ellie.macdonald@legalaid.nsw.gov.au

Aboriginal Legal Service (Bathurst)

Kim Reid, WDO Field Officer, (02) 6331 1255 or
kim.reid@alsnswact.org.au

Legal Aid NSW offers information sessions to organisations interested in becoming approved WDO providers.

General enquiries: wdo@legalaid.nsw.gov.au

Free legal advice on fines is available at your nearest Legal Aid NSW office.

For more details go to www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au

State Debt Recovery Office

www.sdرو.nsw.gov.au

WDO Hotline 1300 478 879

(Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm)