

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS POLICY MANUAL

Title: Remote Area Incentive Package - Registered Nurses	Number: IRM 2.7-17
	Date: JANUARY 2002
	Replaces: MARCH 2000

Introduction

Registered Nursing staff in remote areas live and work in difficult conditions, frequently working long hours and often having to deal with emergencies without medical support.

The daily challenges faced by Registered Nurses in remote areas are well documented and can include professional isolation, an extended scope of practice and working and living in a different social and cultural setting.

In recognition, Cabinet endorsed recommendations by a Task Force established to examine recruitment and retention issues for Registered Nurses in remote areas. The approved isolation compensation package operates from 1 July 1995. This policy, which was developed in consultation with the affected former Regional Health Authorities and the Queensland Nurses Union, details how each component of the package will apply.

The provisions for Registered Nurses who are appointed or relocated to rural and remote locations are contained in IRM 2.3-4 and IRM 2.3-8.

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REMOTE AREA INCENTIVE PACKAGE

Section 1. Full Time Employees

It is noted that some employees under the Nurses (Queensland Public Health Sector) Award 1992 have preserved certain Public Service entitlements. These entitlements include those relating to recreation leave (Regulation 27) and isolation leave and travel concessions, (initially detailed in Cabinet Decision No.41189 of 29 August 1983 and most recently, defined in the DEVETIR circular 4/92).

Accordingly, these employees should receive the provision which is more beneficial.

(a) Recreation Leave

The recreation leave entitlement for Registered Nurses is contained in their relevant award. Hospital based nurses are covered by the Nurses (Queensland Public Hospitals) Award 1991 and community based nurses by the Nurses (Queensland Public Health Sector) Award 1992.

This component provides a Safety Net of a minimum of five (5) weeks recreation leave per annum howsoever entitled for all registered nurses working in designated remote areas, (see attachment 1).

(b) Professional Development

Registered Nurses working in designated remote areas are entitled to a *minimum* of two (2) weeks professional development leave per annum plus travel as required and enrolment and conference costs for approved courses and conferences. Such leave is to be taken at a time mutually agreeable to the remote area nurse and the District Health Service.

Professional development and conference leave may be taken prior to the completion of each 12 months service. For existing employees as at 1 July 1995, the 12 months service for the purpose of accumulating professional development and conference leave commences from that date. Employees engaged after 1 July 1995 accumulate professional development and conference leave from their commencement date.

It should be noted that this leave is not cumulative past the 12 months entitlement and therefore must be taken within the 12 months period. However in special circumstances the District Manager or delegate may allow accumulation up to a maximum of two years entitlement. It should be further noted that under *no* circumstances will cash equivalent be paid, including upon resignation, retirement or transfer out of a remote area.

Where possible, attendance at courses or seminars organised within Queensland Health should be encouraged as these are generally recognised as being more cost effective than commercial events.

(c) Appointment and Transfer Expenses

Appointment and transfer expenses for Registered Nurses in remote areas should be met by the District Health Service at the time of appointment. Such expenses shall be paid in accordance with the directions of the Director General issued under the former Section 4.1 (2) (a) of the Health Services Act and now preserved under Section 28(2) of the Act. For the purposes of this policy, the provisions of IRM 2.3-4 shall apply to employees receiving the incentives package.

Full refund of appointment/transfer expenses not incurred by the District Health Service at the time of appointment will occur upon commencement of duty in a remote area. This is contingent upon the Registered Nurse providing full documentation of expenses incurred. However, should the nurse not complete 18 months of service, a refund of the expenses on a pro rata basis will be required. Under circumstances deemed appropriate, the District Manager may waive the requirement to refund these expenses.

The following formula could be used as a guide for the refund to the employer of appointment and transfer expenses:-

Under six (6) months service	Full cost
Six (6) months after taking up duty but before completing 12 months service	Two thirds cost*
12 months after taking up duty but before completing 18 months service	One third cost*

*Registered Nurses employed under the Nurses (Queensland Public Hospitals) Award 1991 shall have fares and reasonable out of pocket expenses as provided for in Clause 27 of the Award excluded from the calculation.

A written undertaking should be obtained in this regard at the time of engagement.

(d) Airfares

Registered Nurses working in designated remote areas are entitled to two (2) return airfares per annum to the nearest east coast provincial city in conjunction with recreation leave. These airfares are non-accruing and can only be utilised during the year of entitlement. Additionally, under no circumstances will cash equivalent payments be made in lieu of providing the fares.

These airfares are in addition to travel for professional development and are provided to allow regular planned relief from isolation. Rationalisation of professional and recreational activities should be encouraged where possible.

In addition, where applicable, two (2) return airfares per annum are to be provided for a spouse and dependent children. However, should a spouse also be employed as a Registered Nurse in a designated remote area, there should be no "double up" entitlement to airfares.

Where employees have no access to an airport with commercial services, a mileage allowance, paid in accordance with IRM 2.1-22 can be made to the nearest airport with commercial services or east coast provincial city whichever is the closer. See Attachment 3 for a list of provincial cities.

(e) Annual Isolation Bonus

The majority of Registered Nurses in remote areas are employed under the Nurses (Queensland Public Hospitals) Award 1991 and do not receive locality allowance.

To encourage retention of Registered Nurses in remote areas, the following bonus scheme has been designed to allow for periodic payments based on length of service in remote areas:-

- at conclusion of one year of service - \$3,000
- at conclusion of two years of service - \$9,000
- at conclusion of three or more years - \$6,000

At the commencement of the scheme, previous remote area service should be taken into account. It is desirable for reasons of equity to provide existing Registered Nurses with a year or more of service at the beginning of the bonus scheme, with \$6 000 at the end of the first year of the scheme, \$9 000 at the end of the second year of the scheme and \$6 000 for each completed year of service thereafter.

In accordance with the foregoing, payments should be made as follows:-

Existing employees as at 01/07/95

	01/07/96	01/07/97	01/07/98 and each completed year of service thereafter
Less than 12 months service	\$3 000	\$9 000	\$6 000
More than 12 months	\$6 000	\$9 000	\$6 000

Employees commencing on or after 01/07/95

	At completion of 12 months service	At completion of 2 years service	At completion of 3 years service and each completed year of service thereafter
To be paid on anniversary date	\$3 000	\$9 000	\$6 000

No employee will be eligible for a bonus payment during the 1995/96 financial year.

In paying the Annual Isolation Bonus, the following issues should be taken into consideration:-

- i) The bonus payment will be made as a lump sum at the completion of each 12 month's service, however, for tax purposes, the payment should be averaged.
- ii) Bonus payments will only apply to those employees not in receipt of locality allowances. However, these employees are entitled to all other benefits of the isolation incentive package.
- iii) Bonus payments are not cumulative.
- iv) Paid leave is counted as part of the 12 months service period and is recognised for bonus payment purposes. Cash equivalent of paid leave does not count for this purpose.
- v) Unpaid leave in excess of 9 working days shall not be recognised as service for the purposes of this payment.
- vi) The bonus payment does *not* apply for superannuation purposes.
- vii) The bonus payment is not all purpose and should not be included for the calculation of overtime, penalties and leave loading.
- viii) Payment of the bonus should be made on the first applicable pay day after completion of the 12 months service.
- ix) No employee will be eligible for a bonus payment during the 1995/96 financial year.

NOTE:

A Registered Nurse in receipt of locality allowance does not have the option under the Award to change to the bonus payments scheme.

Section 2. PART TIME EMPLOYEES

(a) Recreation Leave

Part time employees shall be entitled to the same recreation leave entitlements as full time employees, provided that the calculation of pay shall be made on a pro rata basis and based upon the average number of hours worked per week during the employees year of employment.

(b) Professional Development

Part time employees are entitled to the same provisions for Professional Development as full time employees ie a minimum of two (2) weeks leave per annum plus travel as required and enrolment and conference costs for approved courses and conferences, eg if a Registered Nurse is employed to work two (2) shifts per week that employee is entitled to two (2) weeks Professional Development leave and receive full pay for four (4) shifts. As for full time employees, no cash equivalent payments will be made.

(c) Appointment and Transfer Expenses

In many cases, part time employees are employed from within the local communities and in those cases, no appointment or transfer expenses will be incurred.

However, in cases where a District, through necessity, is required to recruit from outside the community, appointment or transfer costs which apply to full time employees will be required to be paid. These payments will be made in full and not on a pro rata basis.

The same formula for repayment of expenses will apply if service terminates prior to 18 months.

(d) Airfares

Part time Registered Nurses working in designated remote areas are to be provided with one (1) return airfare per annum to the nearest east coast provincial city in conjunction with recreation leave. See Attachment 3 for a list of provincial cities.

In addition, where applicable, return airfares are to be provided for a spouse and dependent children on the same basis as outlined above.

Where employees have no access to an airport with commercial services, a mileage allowance, paid in accordance with IRM 2.1-22 can be made to the nearest airport with commercial services or east coast provincial city whichever is the closer.

(e) Annual Isolation Bonus

The Isolation Bonus will be paid to part time employees on a pro-rata basis according to the percentage of Full Time Equivalent at which they are employed eg an employee working 50% of full time would be entitled to \$1 500 after a period of 12 months.

Calculation of the bonus shall be based on the same time lines as set out in 1(e).

Section 3. DEFINITION OF REMOTE AREA

In considering the payment of an Isolation Compensation Package, it was recognised that the package should be paid to:

- recognise and provide compensation for hardship or professional and personal dislocation associated with the appointment; and
- improve recruitment and retention in areas where difficulty has been experienced or could be anticipated.

The criteria set out in Attachment 2 has been developed to address these issues. This criteria is to be used as a basis to identify those areas which a District considers to be a remote location.

To include or delete an area from the isolation Package, the following process should be followed:

NEW POSITION

Step 1 Endorsed proposal and Score forwarded to Industrial Relations Unit, Central Office by the District Manager (or delegated nominee) proposing addition to the approved list in accordance with the criteria in Attachment 2.

Step 2 * Prior to Registered Nurses receiving the Isolation Compensation Package, the score should be confirmed by the Industrial Relations Unit, Central Office and the location should be included on the approved list of Remote Areas.

Step 3 Proceed to provide the provisions of the package.

*NOTE: Appropriate data should be submitted to enable the correct score to be substantiated.

A number of locations have been identified by Districts as meeting the criteria (See Attachment 1). These locations will retain the Isolation Compensation Package for the first three years even though a location may not continue to meet the criteria. However, a District may at any time during the three year period, apply for a location to be added to the approved list of remote areas by applying the approved criteria.

A formal re-application of the criteria will be carried out on the original locations and any other additions to the approved list on 1 July 1997. Should a location no longer meet the criteria during this review, the Isolation Compensation Package will cease to be provided as from 1 July 1998. However, Registered Nurses will still be entitled to receive any bonus payments due to them at that date.

REVIEW OF EXISTING POSITION

Step 1 Endorsed proposal and score forwarded to Industrial Relations Unit, Central Office by the District Manager (or delegated nominee) proposing change to approved list.

Step 2 * Industrial Relations Unit, Central Office, confirm the proposed change after consultation with parties to the award and amend the approved list of Remote Areas.

Step 3 Proceed to cease provision of the package according to agreed time frame.

Following the initial review on 1 July 1997, it will be determined by the parties how often further reviews will be carried out.

Section 4. CASUAL EMPLOYEES

No entitlement to Isolation Compensation Package.

Section 5. AGENCY (CONTRACTED) EMPLOYEES

No entitlement to Isolation Compensation Package.

**Section 6. SHORT TERM TEMPORARY EMPLOYEES
(UNDER 12 MONTHS)**

While these employees have no entitlement to the Isolation Compensation Package, the employer may still wish to provide professional development opportunities.

This temporary service may be recognised as service for the provision of the Isolation Compensation Package, in accordance with Section 9 below, of this policy.

**Section 7. LONG TERM TEMPORARY EMPLOYEES
(12 MONTHS AND OVER)**

These employees are entitled to the full Isolation Compensation Package based on length of service.

Section 8. RELIEF STAFF

Although it is expected that the Isolation Compensation Package will decrease turnover and reduce the need for relief staff in the first instance, the implementation of additional leave entitlements will balance this reduction.

Funding has been provided for additional positions to provide support and relief for days off and leave provisions. District Health Services should determine the appropriate method of providing relief staff who would be entitled to the Isolated Compensation Package, in accordance with Sections: 4, 5, 6, and 7 above.

Section 9. RECOGNITION OF SERVICE

Where an employee who is eligible for the incentive package, is seconded to another position which does not attract the isolation compensation package, the time prior to the secondment should be recognised as 'service' for the incentive package upon return to the substantive position.

It should be noted that an employee must hold a "substantive" position within an area that attracts the incentive package to be eligible to retain credit for the service.

Where an employee resigns or is transferred, they do not retain any recognition of service at a 'remote' centre for the purpose of the incentive package.

Any period of unpaid leave does not break the continuity of service for recognition purposes. However, such unpaid leave in excess of nine days is not recognised as "service" for the purposes of the Isolation Compensation Package eg-

A Registered Nurse is employed from 1 February 1996 and granted 3 months unpaid leave from 1 June 1996 – that Registered Nurse would not be eligible for the Isolation Compensation Package until 1 May 1997.

Any period of service that is broken, other than for the reasons stated above is not recognised as service for the provision of the Isolation Compensation Package, unless such break is covered by the cash equivalent of accrued leave.

Section 10. DEFINITIONS

"Spouse" for the purposes of this document shall mean a person who lives with a person of the same or opposite sex on a genuine domestic basis whether or not legally married to the person.

"Dependent child" for the purposes of this document shall mean a child who is wholly or substantially dependent on the employee.

DESIGNATED REMOTE LOCATIONS

GLADSTONE DISTRICT

Many Peaks

CAIRNS

Hopevale
Laura

Wujal Wujal (Bloomfield River)
*Cow Bay Community Health Centre (Diwan)

CAPE YORK DISTRICT

Lockhart River
Napranum
Kowanyama

*Coen
Pompuraaw
(Edward River)

Aurukun
*Weipa

CENTRAL WEST DISTRICT

Yaraka
Muttaborra
*Tambo Primary Health Centre

Windorah
Isisford

Jundah
Boulia

CHARLEVILLE DISTRICT

Thargomindah
Morven

CENTRAL HIGHLANDS DISTRICT

Gemfields
Capella

MT ISA DISTRICT

Camooweal
Dajarra
Normanton

Doomadgee
Burketown
*Gunpowder

Karumba
Morningtown Is.

ROMA DISTRICT

Wallumbilla

ROCKHAMPTON DISTRICT

Woorabinda

TABLELANDS DISTRICT

Mt Garnet
Georgetown

Dimbulah
Forsayth

Croydon
Chillagoe

TOWNSVILLE DISTRICT

Palm Island

TORRES STRAIT AND NORTHERN PENINSULA DISTRICT

St Pauls

Saibai

Mer Island
(Murray Island)

York Island

Badu

Horn Island

Thursday Island Community Centre
Thursday Island Hospital
Bamaga Community Centre
Bamaga Hospital

* Locations designated as remote area subsequent to Cabinet endorsement of the Isolation Compensation Package.

CRITERIA FOR DEFINING REMOTE AREAS IN QUEENSLAND

All criteria are applied to each community and points allocated. A total score of 16 points or greater indicates a Remote Area. Nurses working in these areas are Remote Area Nurses for the purpose of application of the Isolation Compensation Package.

CRITERIA FOR COMMUNITY: _____

FIVE POINTS:

SCORE:

- There is no Medical Officer in residence in the community, and a Medical Officer visits less than once a week.
- There is an establishment of one or two Registered Nurses.
- A nurse is required to be on-call, for emergency situations, due to unavailability of on-site Medical backup, for at least 7 days (average) each fortnight.
- The community is inaccessible due to seasonal conditions, accumulated to be at least 30 days (average) per year.
- The location is either impossible to reach or extremely difficult (i.e. at least 5 hours in optimal conditions to nearest Medical Officer) to reach by road.
- There is no 24 hour reticulated power.

THREE POINTS:

- There is no Medical Officer in residence in the community, but a Medical Officer does visit the community at least once a week.
- The Nurse is operating in a predominantly different culture.
- There is an establishment of only three Registered Nurses.
- A Nurse is required to be on 24 hour on-call, for emergency situations, due to unavailability of on-site medical backup, for between 3 to 6 days (average) per fortnight.
- The normal road connection with the nearest centre is unsealed or in poor condition and is subject to seasonal conditions.

- Night evacuations are not routinely available.
- The Nurse is without a reliable telephone system and must rely on other means of communication (i.e. radio).
- In Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities, an inadequate number (i.e. 1:100) of certified Health Workers are employed.

ONE POINT:

- A Medical Officer is in residence but is not replaced on days off.
- The community does not have social and cultural facilities available to the nurse, and the public entertainment is rarely available.
- No regular public transport is available to the nearest major centre.
- There is no reticulated potable water.
- Facilities for the purchase of a range of goods on site (e.g. clothing, electrical goods, hardware) are limited or non-existent.
- There is little or no employment opportunity for the spouses or partners.

TOTAL:

EAST COAST PROVINCIAL CITIES

Brisbane
Bundaberg
Cairns
Caloundra
Gladstone
Gold Coast

Hervey Bay
Mackay
Maryborough
Redcliffe
Rockhampton
Townsville

Nurses EB6 Protected