

Family accompaniment pilot - information for workers

15 November 2023

What is the family accompaniment pilot?

The Australian Government has committed to allowing Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme workers on long-term placements of between one and 4 years to bring their families to Australia, with the agreement of their employer.

This policy aims to address the social impacts of long periods of family separation and build deeper connections with the Pacific and Timor-Leste family.

Family accompaniment will commence with an initial cohort of 200 families to allow for settings to be tested and adjusted where necessary. This is to help support a positive experience for PALM scheme families, and to determine longer-term implementation arrangements.

Who can apply?

Family accompaniment will be available to long-term PALM scheme workers (one to 4-year visas) who have the agreement of their employer to bring their family to Australia and who meet the eligibility criteria. To be eligible, workers will need to have spent 12 months in Australia and have 18 months remaining on their visa.

For the first selection process, opening in January 2024, only long-term workers from Timor-Leste and Kiribati will be eligible to apply. Although some countries will not participate in the first selection process, there will be a second selection process later in 2024 and other countries may choose to participate in the second round.

Other eligibility criteria are still being finalised. However employers will also need to meet eligibility criteria. This is expected to include the requirement to have employed PALM scheme workers as a direct employer for a minimum of 18 months and have a good track record with the PALM scheme.

200 families will be identified across 2 selection processes in 2024 to participate in the family accompaniment pilot.

Which family members can accompany PALM scheme workers?

Family members will be required to demonstrate that they are a 'member of the family unit' of the PALM scheme worker.

For visa purposes, you are a member of the main applicant's (PALM scheme worker) family unit if you are:

- the main applicant's spouse or de facto partner
- the main applicant's child, or their partner's child, who is not engaged, married or in a de facto relationship and is:
 - aged under 18 years, or
 - aged 18 to 23 years and dependent on the main applicant or the main applicant's partner, or

- aged 23 years or older and dependent on the main applicant or the main applicant's partner due to a partial or total physical or mental disability, or
- the dependent child of the child above.

To apply for family accompaniment, the spouse or de facto partner will be required to have at least a basic/beginner level of English language.

When will the family accompaniment pilot start?

Please don't book flights for your family yet.

The family accompaniment pilot is expected to start in early 2024. The start has been delayed to ensure all legislative and administrative arrangements are in place before families arrive in Australia.

We also need to set up visa arrangements for partners and dependents before we can start welcoming families to Australia.

Once these details are settled, we will provide further information. In the meantime, we are listening to the views of Pacific and Timor-Leste governments, workers, employers, and community organisations to help shape implementation of the policy to ensure we get the settings right.

What benefits will PALM scheme families receive while living in Australia?

- Partners (wife, husband, de facto) will be able to work and study in Australia.
- Children will be able to attend public schools and will not be required to pay international student fees.
- Subject to legislation passing, eligible families will be able to access family assistance benefits, namely the Family Tax Benefit and the Child Care Subsidy.
 - The Family Tax Benefit is a payment made to eligible families to assist with the cost of raising children.
 - The Child Care Subsidy is financial assistance to help cover the cost of formal childcare fees. It is paid directly to approved childcare services.
- The Australian Government will provide access to Medicare for the initial 200 families who will participate in the PALM scheme family accompaniment pilot. Medicare access will support families to receive the health care they need during their time in Australia.

What should PALM scheme workers and their families consider before applying to participate in the family accompaniment pilot?

Before you decide to apply to bring your family to Australia, there are some things you might like to consider.

- There will be costs associated with moving to Australia including passports, visas, travel expenses, health checks, setting up a home and sourcing stationery, laptops and uniforms for children attending school.
- It is expensive to live in many parts of Australia, so families should think about whether they have enough income to support a family in Australia.
- It can be difficult for families to find suitable and affordable accommodation in many parts of Australia right now, so this may limit opportunities for some families seeking to join PALM scheme workers.

- Opportunities for partners and dependents to work in Australia will depend on job vacancy rates where you live, English language and skills requirements (where relevant). In some cases, employers may have work to offer a spouse or dependent, while in other locations, there may be few work opportunities.

Will all PALM scheme workers have access to Medicare?

Access to Medicare will only be provided for the 200 workers and their families participating in the family accompaniment pilot.

Does access to Medicare mean PALM scheme workers and families participating in the family accompaniment pilot don't need to obtain private health insurance?

Medicare does not cover all health care costs. Workers and families participating in the pilot will be strongly encouraged to take out private health insurance to cover events not covered by Medicare.

Where can I find out more information?

Further information on family accompaniment, including when it will start, will be provided in the coming months on the PALM scheme website (<https://www.palmscheme.gov.au>) and on the PALM scheme Facebook page.

The Australian Government has also announced the creation of the Pacific Engagement Visa (PEV) which will provide an opportunity for permanent migration to Australia.

This is a separate program from the PALM scheme. If you would like more information on the Pacific Engagement Visa, please visit the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website (<https://www.dfat.gov.au/pacific-engagement-visa>).