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What can you claim if you're a Public Servant?

SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN TAXATION OFFICE

With work-related expense claims high on the ATO radar, the Australian Taxation Office is stepping up to help and provide advice for taxpayers who aren't quite sure what they can and cannot claim.

The ATO have already flagged that over-claiming of deductions is a big issue. The ATO wants taxpayers to get right what they claim as tax deductions.

We understand tax time can be tricky and taxpayers often ask whether we have advice about what they can and cannot claim based on their job. The good news is that we do. The most popular topics include car, clothing, travel, working from home and self-education expenses.

Getting the right information before you lodge your income tax return is helping

our clients to get their claims right and avoid issues later on.

We want every person to have the information they need to know whether they can make a claim, to get it right, and know what records they need to keep. Understanding what you can and cannot claim will help ensure that your income tax return is processed quickly and any refund is paid as soon as possible. Most people want to lodge their income tax return with the right information and helping people to do that in the first place is the most efficient way to operate.

Our objective is to educate you; this is just part of the process.

What you can and can't claim

Each occupation has specific circumstances which affect what can and cannot be claimed. Here are some snippets from some ATO occupation guides. Remember, regardless of the occupation you are in, you can only claim the work-related part of expenses, and you must meet the three golden rules:

- You must have spent the money yourself and not been reimbursed;
- The claim must be directly related to earning your income; and
- You need a record to prove it.

Public Servant employees: work-related expenses

Common deductions include the following:

1. You can claim a deduction when you:
 - drive between separate jobs on the same day – eg. from your public service job to a second job as a musician, or
 - drive to and from an alternate workplace for the same employer on the same day – eg. travelling to a different office to attend a meeting for the same employer.

In limited circumstances you can claim the cost of trips between home and work, where you were required to carry bulky tools or equipment for work and all of the following conditions were met:

- The tools or equipment were essential for you to perform your employment duties and you didn't carry them merely as a matter of choice, and
- The tools or equipment were bulky – meaning that because of their size and weight they were awkward to transport and could only be transported conveniently by the use of a motor vehicle, and
- There was no secure storage for the items at the workplace.



If you claim car expenses, you need to keep a logbook to determine the work-related percentage, or be able to demonstrate to the ATO a reasonable calculation if you use the cents per kilometre method to claim.

2. You can claim a percentage of the running costs of your home office if you have to work from home, including depreciation of office equipment, work-related phone calls and internet access charges, and electricity for heating, cooling and lighting costs.
3. You can claim a deduction for the cost of buying, hiring, mending or cleaning certain uniforms that are unique and distinctive to your job – eg. clothing items you're required to wear which have a logo that is unique and distinctive to your employer – or protective clothing that your employer requires you to wear.
4. You can claim a deduction for self-education expenses if your course relates directly to your current job, eg. human

resource training for a manager.

5. As long as the expense relates to your employment, you can claim a deduction for the work-related portion of the cost of:
 - seminars and conferences,
 - technical or professional publications, and
 - union and professional association fee.

However, you usually **cannot** claim home to work travel, and you **cannot** claim clothes or shoes that are not uniform or are not designed to provide you with sufficient protection from the risk of injury at your worksite, even if the item is called 'workwear' or 'tradie wear' by the supplier.

Footnote: Please note that the information here is a general overview. Taxation is a complicated matter and you should seek specific advice from a qualified and experienced professional suited to your circumstances.



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