

SMJFL Mental Health Guidelines for Age Dispensation

Scope: In 2020, the SMJFL had to inevitably cancel the 2020 season in July, after initially delaying the season in April due to the lockdowns and restrictions that were implemented in Victoria. It has been well publicised that many of the younger population have suffered greatly and have missed out on sports, school and socialisation that has affected their mental health.

In 2021, many senior AFL Metropolitan leagues applied an Overage Player Policy to allow players to play another year in their U19's competition. The SMJFL, in consultation with AFL Victoria and Metro Senior leagues, will not be allowing overage players to play in the SMJFL U17.5 competition, unless they satisfy the AFL National Age Dispensation Policy or this new set of guidelines.

In consultation with AFL Victoria, the need for a bridging mental health guideline is due to their National Age Dispensation Policy being silent regarding providing any age dispensation on mental health grounds.

In previous seasons, players have been granted an age dispensation when producing a Mental Health Plan from their local GP. The new SMJFL Mental Health Dispensation Guidelines, will coexist with the current AFL National Age Dispensation Policy, will give guidance, processes, and protocols for age dispensations due to mental health.

Club process: Clubs are required to fill out the SMJFL Age Dispensation Application form, one per player. When asked 'What factors would you like to apply for an age dispensation?' the 'Other' option must be selected, stating mental health. The club must attach a certificate from a medical specialist, as defined in the [AFL National Age Dispensation Policy](#) and is practising in the mental health space, that outlines the players diagnosis and reasoning why the player will benefit from playing down an age group and not in their rightful age group. Once the application has been received a committee will assess the application and decide on the outcome.

Committee personnel: The committee will consist of a League appointed medical professional and two independent committee members.

Committee guidelines: The committee will assess each application on the following items, but not limited to:

- The medical specialist's certificate and medical opinion;
- Players playing record, League B&F points, and awards;
- Age group dynamics, the player may have played in a higher division, but the club only had a single team in that age group; and

League guidelines: All applications need to be submitted online prior to the start of Round 4 in the home and away season. The league may seek committee advice and the SMJFL may revoke any approved dispensation, at any time. A dispensation may be revoked in the following incidences:

- The player plays in a higher ranked competition than the dispensation was given for,
- The player is found guilty of an offence that results in a suspension,
- The committee or League feel that it's in the best interest of the League to remove the player.

Timeline: The application will be processed within seven business days and an outcome will be reached within 10 business days from the submitted application date. This process will be longer than the current five business days due to seeking advice outside of the SMJFL.

Outcome: The committee shall retain, in its absolute discretion, the ability to exempt a player to compete in one age group lower than their rightful age group where they are satisfied that the player will greatly benefit from the dispensation.