

The Age Pension Guide

October 2011

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*Working
for Wide Bay*



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Foreword

Older Australians make a wonderful contribution to their communities. All Australians have an obligation to respect their achievements for our country and ensure they have the support they need in their retirement years.

Many Seniors tell me that they are worried about Labor's carbon tax and how it will add to their cost of living. As the carbon tax applies to electricity and many other inputs, all good and services produced in Australia will attract the tax which will be passed on to consumers. The Government is offering compensation that will offset some of the effects of the tax, including for pensioners and retirees – but some households will be worse off. The Liberal and National Parties believe there are better ways to address climate change without the need for a new tax.

I have produced a special edition of my electorate newsletter which explains the carbon tax and how it works. If you would like a copy of the newsletter please contact my office and I will arrange for one to be sent to you.

Since Labor was elected, real electricity prices are going up by an average of over 10 per cent a year. Under the carbon tax, the price of electricity will increase by an additional 10 per cent and the cost of food, public transport, building and everything else we buy will also rise.

In spite of national debt now exceeding \$200 billion, the Federal Government is still borrowing \$100 million every day to pay for its spending schemes. This borrowing forces financial institutions to increase their interest rates. Interest and redemption repayments on government debt will eat into funds that could otherwise be available for future expenditure on hospitals, roads and the environment.

This edition of the Age Pension Guide provides information on the latest terms and conditions that apply to the Age Pension. I hope you will find it helpful. Please call my office on **1300 301 968** for any further information you may require.

WARREN TRUSS

Your notes

This guide is not intended to provide complete information on pensions and the conditions that apply, which are subject to change from time to time

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AGE PENSION

AGE PENSION RATES

QUESTION **WHAT IS THE MAXIMUM RATE OF THE PENSION?**

ANSWER

	Per week	Per fortnight	Per year
Single Pensioner	\$344.50	\$689.00	\$17,914.00
Pensioner Couple (each person)	\$259.70	\$519.40	\$13,504.40

The above figures do not include the pension supplement – see pages 10 & 11.

QUESTION **HOW ARE THE AGE PENSION RATE AND AGE PENSION INCREASES CALCULATED?**

ANSWER The Age Pension rate must be at least 27.7% of Male Total Average Weekly earnings.

Age Pension increases are also calculated using rises in the Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index, or the Consumer Price Index, whichever is higher.

QUESTION **WHEN WILL THE PENSION RATE NEXT INCREASE?**

ANSWER The next Pension rate review will occur in March 2012.

PENSION PAY DAY

QUESTION **WHEN WILL MY PENSION BE PAID?**

ANSWER Pensioners are able to choose which weekday they are paid. Many pensioners are paid every second Thursday. Members of a couple are paid on the same day, unless special circumstances apply. If you would like to change your pay day, please contact Centrelink.

OVERSEAS TRAVEL

QUESTION **IS MY PENSION AFFECTED IF I TRAVEL OVERSEAS?**

ANSWER Pensions and other similar payments may be affected by absence from Australia. Australian Government concession cards may be cancelled when the card holder leaves Australia for more than 13 weeks. The cards are then able to be reissued on return. If you are planning to travel overseas please contact Centrelink.

INCOME AND ASSET TESTS, TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

INCOME TEST

QUESTION ***UNDER THE INCOME TEST, HOW MUCH EXTRA INCOME, AS WELL AS MY PENSION, CAN I RECEIVE BEFORE I LOSE MY PENSION?***

ANSWER

		Per fortnight	Per year
Pension starts reducing when your income is more than	SINGLE PENSIONER	\$150.00	\$3,900.00
	PENSIONER COUPLE (combined income)	\$264.00	\$6,864.00
Pension cuts out completely when your income is more than	SINGLE PENSIONER	\$1,647.60	\$42,837.60
	PENSIONER COUPLE (combined income)	\$2,522.00	\$65,572.00
These figures may be higher if you receive Rent Assistance with your payment.			

QUESTION ***WHAT HAPPENS IF MY INCOME IS GREATER THAN \$150.00 ALLOWABLE INCOME (\$264.00 FOR A PENSIONER COUPLE) IN ANY FORTNIGHT?***

ANSWER Income over these amounts reduces the rate of pension payable by 50 cents in the dollar for single pensioners and 25 cents in the dollar for each member of a couple.

WORK BONUS SCHEME

QUESTION ***WHAT IS THE WORK BONUS SCHEME?***

ANSWER The Work Bonus provides an incentive for pensioners over Age Pension age to participate in the workforce. Under the Work Bonus, half of the first \$250 of employment income earned per fortnight will be disregarded under the income test.

Any unused portion of the \$250 fortnightly exemption accrues up to a maximum of \$6,500. This is used to offset future assessable employment income.

There is no need to apply for the scheme, but pensioners will need to inform Centrelink of their earnings.

TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

QUESTION **MY PENSION IS ASSESSED UNDER THE TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?**

ANSWER There are transitional arrangements to ensure that existing pensioners do not receive reduced pensions as a result of the changes to the Age Pension that occurred from 20 September 2009.

The transitional provisions allow for the assessment of Age Pension entitlements under the old and the new rules. When the new rules produce the same or a higher payment for a pensioner, their entitlement is assessed under the new rules immediately and permanently. If a pensioner is worse off under the new rules, they are paid a transitional rate.

New Age Pension recipients from 20 September 2009 are all assessed under the new rules.

QUESTION **WHAT IS THE MAXIMUM RATE OF THE PENSION UNDER THE TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS?**

ANSWER

	Per week	Per fortnight	Per year
Single Pensioner	\$333.60	\$667.20	\$17,347.20
Pensioner Couple (each person)	\$269.40	\$538.80	\$14,008.80

The above figures do not include the pension supplement – see pages 10 & 11.

QUESTION **WHAT IS THE INCOME TEST FOR PENSIONERS UNDER THE TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS?**

ANSWER

		Per fortnight	Per year
Pension starts reducing when your income is more than	SINGLE PENSIONER	\$150.00	\$3,900.00
	PENSIONER COUPLE (combined income)	\$264.00	\$6,864.00
Pension cuts out completely when your income is more than	SINGLE PENSIONER	\$1,818.00	\$47,268.00
	PENSIONER COUPLE (combined income)	\$2,958.00	\$76,908.00

For transitional or saved cases, income over these amounts reduces the rate of pension payable by 40 cents in the dollar (single) and 20 cents in the dollar each (for couples).

These figures may be higher if you receive Rent Assistance with your payment.

Allowable income is increased by up to \$24.60 per fortnight for each dependant child.

ASSETS TEST

QUESTION ***WHICH ASSETS ARE INCLUDED IN THE ASSETS TEST?***

ANSWER All your belongings including your car and the contents of your home are counted, **except** items such as:

- Your home in which you live
- The proceeds from the sale of a previous home which will be applied within 12 months to the purchase of another home
- Donation for life-time accommodation with accepted organisations
- Special aids for disabilities
- Income stream products meeting all criteria for assets test exemption
- Gift cars provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs
- Awards for valour, such as medals received for war service
- Life interest (not created by you or your partner)
- Funeral bonds up to \$11,000
- Any interest in a deceased person's estate which you have not yet received

QUESTION ***I HAVE SOME ASSETS AND SOME INCOME. WHICH TEST WILL BE USED TO DETERMINE MY ELIGIBILITY FOR THE PENSION?***

ANSWER Your pension will be calculated separately under both the assets test and the income test. Whichever test gives the lower pension is used.

QUESTION ***IF I DO OWN THE HOME IN WHICH I LIVE, WHAT VALUE OF ASSETS CAN I HAVE BEFORE MY PENSION IS AFFECTED?***

ANSWER

	Single Pensioner	Pensioner Couple (combined)
Pension starts reducing when you have assets worth more than...	\$186,750#	\$265,000#
Pension cuts out completely when you have assets worth more than...	\$686,000	\$1,018,000*

QUESTION *IF I DO NOT OWN THE HOME IN WHICH I LIVE, WHAT VALUE OF ASSETS CAN I HAVE BEFORE MY PENSION IS AFFECTED?*

ANSWER

	Single Pensioner	Pensioner Couple (combined)
Pension starts reducing when you have assets worth more than...	\$321,750#	\$400,000#
Pension cuts out completely when you have assets worth more than...	\$821,000	\$1,153,000*

QUESTION *WHAT IS THE ASSET TEST FOR HOMEOWNERS UNDER THE TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS*

ANSWER

	Single Pensioner	Pensioner Couple (combined)
Pension starts reducing when you have assets worth more than...	\$186,750#	\$265,000#
Pension cuts out completely when you have assets worth more than...	\$631,750	\$983,500*

QUESTION *WHAT IS THE ASSET TEST FOR NON-HOMEOWNERS UNDER THE TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS*

ANSWER

	Single Pensioner	Pensioner Couple (combined)
Pension starts reducing when you have assets worth more than...	\$321,750#	\$400,000#
Pension cuts out completely when you have assets worth more than...	\$766,750	\$1,118,500*

For above tables: there are no income or assets tests for permanently blind age pensioners; upper limits may be increased if rent assistance is paid with the pension.
The pension is reduced by \$1.50 per fortnight for every \$1,000 above these amounts.

* Higher for illness separated couple.

QUESTION *IF I SELL MY ASSETS NOW I WILL SUFFER A CONSIDERABLE LOSS, AND I DON'T HAVE ANY INCOME.*

ANSWER

Ask about the hardship provisions, or whether you can obtain the pension as a loan under the Pension Loan Scheme.

QUESTION ***DO RETIREMENT VILLAGE RESIDENTS RECEIVE AN EXTRA ASSETS TEST ALLOWANCE?***

ANSWER Retirement village residents are able to have extra allowable assets of \$135,000 for a single pensioner, or couple combined. If your village entry contribution is equal to or less than the extra allowable amount, you are assessed as a non-homeowner. Your entry contribution will count as an asset but it is not regarded as a financial investment under the income test deeming rules. You may qualify for rent assistance.

Age care hostel bonds are exempt from the assets test entirely.

QUESTION ***HOW MUCH LAND AROUND MY HOME MAY I OWN WITHOUT AFFECTING MY PENSION?***

ANSWER Normally 2 hectares surrounding a pensioner's home is considered to be part of the home and not counted in the home owners asset test. However, where a person has lived for 20 years on a farm and it would be unreasonable to sell or lease it, and where the pensioner is making effective use of the land to generate income, the entire value of the land on the same title as the home is exempt from the Age Pension assets test.

GIFTING

QUESTION ***CAN I GIVE PART OF MY ASSETS AWAY?***

ANSWER Yes, you can give away money and other assets to any value you choose. However, gifts which are of more value than the allowable gifting limit may affect the rate of pension or allowance you receive.

If you gift assets of more than \$10,000 in a single financial year, or more than \$30,000 in a five (financial) year rolling period, the amount gifted (above either of these two amounts) is added to the total value of your financial investments for five years. At the end of the five year period it is disregarded.

PENSION SUPPLEMENT

QUESTION **WHAT IS THE PENSION SUPPLEMENT?**

ANSWER The pension supplement is a payment which combines the former GST Supplement, Pharmaceutical Allowance, Telephone Allowance and the Utilities Allowance. The payment is made fortnightly with the regular Pension payment.

QUESTION **WHAT IS THE RATE OF THE PENSION SUPPLEMENT?**

ANSWER

	Per fortnight (basic rate)	Per fortnight (minimum)	Per fortnight (maximum)
Single Pensioner	\$20.90	\$32.20	\$59.80
Pensioner couple (each person)	\$17.40	\$24.30	\$45.10

QUESTION **WHO RECEIVES THE PENSION SUPPLEMENT?**

ANSWER The Pension Supplement is paid to those who receive the Age Pension, Carer Payment, Wife Pension, Widow B Pension, Bereavement Allowance, and Disability Support Pension (excluding those aged under 21 without children).

All other income support recipients who are over Age Pension age, also receive the Pension Supplement.

Pensioners receiving the transitional rate have the value of the Pension Supplement added to their transitional rate amount.

QUESTION **WHEN DO I RECEIVE THE PENSION SUPPLEMENT?**

ANSWER The Pension Supplement is included automatically as part of regular fortnightly income support payments. You do not need to apply for the Pension Supplement and it does not show as a separate amount.

You may elect to receive the 'minimum' amount on a quarterly basis, even if you are entitled to more than the minimum Pension Supplement.

QUESTION ***IS THE PENSION SUPPLEMENT MEANS-TESTED?***

ANSWER Yes, the Pension Supplement is subject to the means test. If you are eligible to receive some income support payment, you will receive at least the minimum rate of the Pension Supplement. The amount you receive above the minimum rate is determined by the means test.

QUESTION ***WHAT ARE PENSIONERS PAID UNDER THE TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS ENTITLED TO?***

ANSWER Pensioners receiving the transitional rate have an amount equivalent to the Pension Supplement included in their pension. It does not show as a separate amount.

QUESTION ***DO THE MINIMUM AMOUNT RULES APPLY TO PENSIONERS PAID UNDER THE TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS?***

ANSWER Yes, pensioners benefiting from the transitional arrangements arising from the income test changes are subject to the 'minimum' amount rules so that the minimum amount is paid in full where a part-rate entitlement exists.

QUESTION ***I PREVIOUSLY RECEIVED TELEPHONE ALLOWANCE AT THE HIGHER RATE FOR MY INTERNET CONNECTION. WILL THIS BE REFLECTED IN MY PENSION SUPPLEMENT (OR TRANSITIONAL RATE)?***

ANSWER The rate of Pension Supplement (and the transitional rate) is based on the value of the higher (internet) rate of Telephone Allowance.

QUESTION ***IF I LEAVE AUSTRALIA, EITHER TEMPORARILY OR PERMANENTLY, WILL I BE ELIGIBLE FOR THE PENSION SUPPLEMENT?***

ANSWER You will be eligible for the Pension Supplement for up to 13 weeks if you depart Australia temporarily, as long as your primary income support payment remains payable. If you are still outside of Australia after 13 weeks, and you remain eligible for your income support payment, the Pension Supplement will reduce to the basic amount.

If you depart Australia permanently and your pension remains payable, you will receive the Pension Supplement basic amount.

CARBON TAX

QUESTION ***WHAT COMPENSATION WILL BE PAID TO PENSIONERS FOR THE EXTRA COSTS OF THE CARBON TAX?***

ANSWER The Government has announced that it intends to make an advance payment of \$250 for single pensioners and \$190 for each member of a couple in May/June 2012 to meet some of the cost of the carbon tax. From March 2013 assistance will be delivered through higher fortnightly payments (13.50 per fortnight for singles and \$10.20 each for a couple). These rates vary for other benefits.

Self funded retirees will receive a higher Seniors Supplement (up to \$338 per year for singles and \$255 for each eligible member of a couple).

Tax free thresholds will treble in 2012 to \$18,200 (\$19,400 in 2015) but tax rates will increase from 15% to 19% and 30% to 33%. The low income tax rebate will be reduced.

CENTREPAY

QUESTION ***WHAT IS CENTREPAY?***

ANSWER Centrepay allows pensioners to have automatic deductions taken from their payments for rent, electricity, gas and rates. Centrepay arrangements are voluntary and free for pensioners.

Payments can only be made to organisations which have a contract with Centrelink. These organisations pay a small fee for the service. Call Centrelink for more information.

LOANS OR ADVANCES

QUESTION ***WHAT IF I NEED SOME CASH FOR AN URGENT EXPENSE?***

ANSWER You may be eligible for a pension advance payment of up to \$1,000. This advance will then be recovered, interest free, from your pension payments over the next 13 fortnights. You can also make extra repayments in cash.

INCOME TAX, INVESTMENTS AND DEEMING

QUESTION ***HOW MUCH INCOME CAN I EARN, INCLUDING THE PENSION, BEFORE I START PAYING TAX?***

ANSWER The Senior Australians Tax Offset ensures that no tax is payable by a person whose assessable income consists of the full pension and, in some cases, a small amount of non-pension income. From 1 July 2011 the maximum tax offset available is \$2,230 for single senior Australians and \$1,602 for each member of a couple.

This measure allows single senior Australians to have an income of \$30,685 without paying tax. Senior couples are able to have income of up to \$26,680 each without paying tax. The tax offset cuts out at \$48,525 for a single pensioner and \$39,496 for each member of a couple (higher if living apart because of illness).

As of 1 July 2011, senior Australians do not pay a Medicare Levy until they reach an income of \$30,685 (singles) or \$53,360 (couples - combined income – although this may vary according to your circumstances). For more information call Medicare Australia – 13 20 11.

QUESTION: ***WHAT IS THE LOW INCOME TAX OFFSET?***

ANSWER The Low Income Tax Offset is available to all low income earners irrespective of their age. The low income offset is \$1,500. You will receive the full offset if your taxable income is below \$30,000. It is reduced by 4 cents for every dollar over that amount until your taxable income reaches \$67,500 when it cuts out completely. Any unused portions can not be refunded.

QUESTION ***MY INCOME ALLOWS ME TO STILL RECEIVE THE FULL PENSION. DO I NEED TO COMPLETE A TAX RETURN?***

ANSWER Usually no. You should refer to the Taxpack or information provided by Centrelink which will advise you if you are required to lodge a tax return.

If you have paid tax during the last financial year, then you should lodge a tax return.

If this is the first time that you have not had to lodge a tax return then you should notify the Tax Office that you will not be lodging a tax return in future years. Complete a "Non Lodgement Advice" form located in the front of the Taxpack.

QUESTION ***DO I NEED TO GIVE MY TAX FILE NUMBER TO CENTRELINK OR THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS?***

ANSWER In most circumstances, yes.

QUESTION ***SHOULD I GIVE MY BANK OR BUILDING SOCIETY MY TAX FILE NUMBER?***

ANSWER Generally no, but the law now requires it when opening new accounts and in some other circumstances. You do need to tell your bank or building society that you are receiving a pension. Otherwise, your interest will be taxed at the highest rate.

If you require further information on tax call the Australian Taxation Office on telephone 13 28 61.

INVESTMENTS AND DEEMING

QUESTION ***WHAT IS DEEMING?***

ANSWER “Deeming” is where your money is assumed by Centrelink to be earning a set rate of interest per annum. This assumed earning is the figure counted as income on investments for the Pension income test (page 5 or 7 depending on your circumstances) even if your investments have not actually earned this amount or are earning more than this amount.

QUESTION ***WHAT ASSETS ARE DEEMED?***

ANSWER Funds deposited in bank, building society and credit union accounts, as well as:

- Cash
- Term deposits and debentures
- Friendly society bonds
- Managed investments
- Assets in superannuation and rollover funds held by anyone of age pension age
- Listed shares and securities
- Short term asset tested income streams
- Loans, including those to family trusts and companies
- Shares in unlisted public companies
- Gold and other bullion.

QUESTION *WHAT INVESTMENTS ARE NOT DEEMED?*

- ANSWER** A person's home or its contents, as well as:
- Cars, boats and caravans
 - Antiques, stamp or coin collections
 - Accommodation bonds in aged care homes
 - Assets in superannuation and rollover funds held by anyone under Age Pension age
 - Standard life insurance policies
 - Holiday homes, farms or other real estate
 - Income streams other than asset tested income streams (short term).

QUESTION *WHAT IS THE RATE WHICH FINANCIAL INVESTMENTS ARE DEEMED TO EARN?*

ANSWER

Single Pensioner	FIRST \$44,600 OVER \$44,600	3% 4.5%
Pensioner Couple (both receiving a pension or one person receiving the pension and the other receiving a living allowance)	FIRST \$74,400 OVER \$74,400	3% 4.5%
These rates are subject to regular review, especially when interest rates change.		

QUESTION *IF MY ONLY SOURCE OF INCOME IS FROM FINANCIAL INVESTMENTS, HOW MUCH CAN I HAVE INVESTED BEFORE I START LOSING SOME OF MY PENSION UNDER THE INCOME TEST OR THE "DEEMING" PROVISIONS?*

ANSWER

Single Pensioner	\$101,533
Pensioner Couple (combined income)	\$177,333
These figures are based on deeming rates mentioned previously and apply only if you have no other income. Rates will also change if you have dependent children.	

QUESTION *CAN I STILL GET A PARTIAL PENSION IF MY INVESTMENTS ARE IN EXCESS OF THOSE MENTIONED?*

ANSWER Yes, until either the income or assets test limits are reached.

PENSION AGE

QUESTION ***FROM WHAT AGE CAN I RECEIVE THE AGE PENSION?***

ANSWER Men – from age 65 years.
Women – depends on your date of birth.

The Age Pension eligibility age for women has been increasing over fifteen years from 60 to 65 years. The table indicates when women in each group will be affected.

Date of birth between	Qualifying age for Age Pension (years)
Before 30 June 1944	63
1 July 1944 and 31 December 1945	63 and 6 months
1 January 1946 and 30 June 1947	64
1 July 1947 and 31 December 1948	64 and 6 months
1 January 1949 and 30 June 1952	65

QUESTION ***I HAVE HEARD THAT THE ELIGIBILITY AGE FOR THE AGE PENSION WILL INCREASE, WILL THIS AFFECT ME?***

ANSWER Changes to the qualifying age for the Age Pension will begin from 1 July 2017. From this time, the qualifying age for the Age Pension will gradually increase from 65 to 67 years for both men and women.

The gradual increase means that the eligibility age for the Age Pension will be 67 years from 1 July 2023. Everyone born after 1 July 1952 will be affected by the transition to the new qualifying age.

Date of change	Date of birth between	Qualifying age for Age Pension (years)
1 July 2017	1 July 1952 to 31 December 1953	65 years and 6 months
1 July 2019	1 January 1954 to 30 June 1955	66 years
1 July 2021	1 July 1955 to 31 December 1956	66 years and 6 months
1 July 2023	1 January 1957 and later	67 years

PENSION BONUS SCHEME

QUESTION **WHAT IS THE PENSION BONUS SCHEME?**

ANSWER The Pension Bonus Scheme was intended to reward older Australians who continued to work past Age Pension or Service Pension Age, rather than retiring and claiming a pension.

The Scheme provides a tax free lump sum to eligible registered people who defer claiming the Age Pension or Service Pension and continue to work. The bonus is available when people retire, but they must be registered in the Scheme for a minimum of one year and must claim and receive the Age Pension. The scheme is entirely voluntary. To achieve a bonus the person must work at least 960 hours each year they defer their pension.

The Government decided to close the Scheme in its 2009/10 Budget and so no new applications will be accepted. Those who have already registered for the Pension Bonus will remain eligible.

QUESTION **WHAT WOULD THE BONUS BE WORTH AT SEPTEMBER 2010 PENSION RATES FOR A PERSON WHO WOULD QUALIFY FOR THE MAXIMUM RATE OF PENSION?**

ANSWER

Number of extra years of work	Single person	Partnered person (each)
1 Year	\$1,735.00	\$1,311.90
2 Years	\$6,940.00	\$5,274.80
3 Years	\$15,615.00	\$11,807.50
4 Years	\$27,759.90	\$20,991.00
5 Years	\$43,374.90	\$32,798.50

RENT ASSISTANCE

QUESTION ***HOW MUCH ASSISTANCE CAN I GET TO HELP PAY MY RENT OR LODGINGS?***

ANSWER Before Rent Assistance becomes payable, a minimum amount of rent (rent threshold) must be paid. Rent Assistance is then paid at 75 cents for every dollar of rent paid above the rent threshold, up to a maximum rate.

	Single Pensioner (\$ per fortnight)	Pensioner Couple (combined, \$ per fortnight)
Maximum Rent Assistance	\$119.40	\$112.60
Minimum rent before Rent Assistance is paid...	\$106.20	\$172.80
Maximum Rent Assistance is paid when rent is more than...	\$265.40	\$322.93

QUESTION ***WHAT IF MY PENSION IS CALCULATED UNDER THE ASSETS TEST. WOULD I BE ENTITLED TO RENT ASSISTANCE?***

ANSWER Yes.

Rent Assistance is not paid to people paying rent to a State Government housing authority. Rent Assistance is also not paid to people in Commonwealth funded nursing homes and hostels. Rates vary if pensioners have dependent children. Special rules apply to single sharers, people who pay board and lodging or who live in a retirement village.

OTHER SUPPLEMENTS, PAYMENTS AND ALLOWANCES

CARER PAYMENT

QUESTION ***WHAT IS THE CARER PAYMENT?***

ANSWER Carer Payment may be paid to someone providing constant care to a person with severe physical, intellectual or psychiatric disability. The person being cared for must need the care permanently, or for a fixed period. The care should be provided in the person's home, but it is not necessary for the carer and the person being cared for to live in the same home.

Carer Payment is paid at the same rate as the Age Pension and is subject to the same income and assets tests. A person cannot receive carer payment at the same time as another income support payment such as Age Pension, but in such cases he or she may be eligible for other payments such as Carer Allowance.

Carers can interrupt providing constant care for 25 hours per week to work, train or study without losing eligibility for Carer Payment. They may also continue to be paid during up to 63 days of respite.

CARER ALLOWANCE

QUESTION ***WHAT IS THE CARER ALLOWANCE?***

ANSWER Carer Allowance is a payment made to someone who cares for a person who is frail, aged or who has a disability, or is chronically ill, and who requires a lot of additional care because of their disability.

The person being cared for must need care permanently or for an extended period, but the carer and the person being cared for do not have to live in the same home.

Carer Allowance, currently \$110.00 per fortnight, is not subject to an income or assets test. Carer Allowance can be paid in addition to an income support payment such as Age Pension. An additional annual payment of \$1,000 (Child Disability Assistance) is available to a person receiving Carer Allowance for each child under 16 years of age being cared for. This payment is made on 1 July each year.

CARER SUPPLEMENT

QUESTION ***WHAT IS THE CARER SUPPLEMENT?***

ANSWER Carer Supplement is a payment that is made to all recipients of the Carer Payment, Wife Pension, Department of Veterans' Affairs Partner Service Pension and Department of Veterans' Affairs Carer Service pension. It replaces the previous Budget one off carer bonuses.

Carer Supplement is also paid to recipients of Carer Allowance for each person they care for.

Carer Supplement, currently up to \$600 for each person being cared for, is paid every year in July.

PARTNER ALLOWANCE

QUESTION ***WHAT IS THE PARTNER ALLOWANCE?***

ANSWER This payment has been for partners of people who receive income support payments and who face barriers to finding employment because of their previous limited participation in the workforce. Partner Allowance recipients have access, on a voluntary basis, to all levels of employment assistance within the job network.

People receiving Partner Allowance are also offered help from a personal adviser to plan for their future. Telephone Centrelink on 13 27 17 if you wish to contact a personal adviser.

QUESTION ***WHO CAN RECEIVE PARTNER ALLOWANCE?***

ANSWER No new claims for the Partner Allowance are being accepted but you will continue to receive this payment if you were already receiving it as of 19 September 2003.

CARE FOR THE ELDERLY

AGED CARE ASSISTANCE

QUESTION *I AM GETTING FRAIL AND NEED TO GO INTO AN AGED PERSONS HOME. WHAT SHOULD I DO?*

ANSWER Before you can enter a nursing home or hostel, your needs must be assessed by an Aged Care Assessment Team.

QUESTION *HOW DO I CONTACT AN AGED CARE ASSESSMENT TEAM?*

ANSWER Your local doctor will tell you how to contact the closest team. Referral can be through community nurses, your doctor, from hospitals or yourself.

QUESTION *WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A NURSING HOME AND AN AGED PERSON'S HOSTEL?*

ANSWER A nursing home cares for people who need constant nursing care. Nursing homes are now called "High Care" residential. A hostel accommodates people who are frail, but do not yet need constant care – "Low Care" residential. The Government provides benefits on the basis of the level of care provided rather than where someone lives.

QUESTION *WHAT WILL I NEED TO PAY ON ENTRANCE TO AN AGED CARE FACILITY?*

ANSWER This will depend on whether the facility is a nursing home or a hostel as they have different arrangements depending on your circumstances. Ring the Department of Health and Ageing for more information on 1800 500 853.

QUESTION *WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO LIVE IN A HOSTEL OR NURSING HOME?*

ANSWER Services vary in cost and are subject to an income test. Some are also subject to an assets test.

AGED CARE ASSISTANCE

QUESTION ***IS THERE ANY HELP TO ENABLE ME TO LIVE AT HOME FOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE?***

ANSWER There are many home and community based services which will help you remain independent. The Federal Government has established Carelink, which maintains an up to date database of information about a range of agencies providing community care, support, health and aged services in the region, including Home and Community Care and Community Aged Care packages. See page 24 for details.

QUESTION ***CAN A CARER GET ANY FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO HELP CARE FOR ME AT HOME?***

ANSWER People who care for you may be eligible for the Carer Payment and/or the Carer Allowance. Both of these payments are made through Centrelink. See pages 19 and 20 for details.

HEALTH CARE AND CONCESSION CARDS

PRIVATE HEALTH CARE

QUESTION ***WHAT EXTRA HELP IS AVAILABLE FOR OLDER AUSTRALIANS TO MAKE PRIVATE HEALTH CARE MORE AFFORDABLE?***

ANSWER The Federal Government provides a 30% rebate off the premium cost for private health insurance. The rebate is not capped and not asset or income tested. The Government indicated its intention to impose an income test on the rebate in its 2011 Budget but this has not yet occurred.

A higher rebate is paid for older Australians.

The rebates are as follows:

Age	Private health insurance premium rebate
0-64	30%
65-69	35%
Over 70 years	40%

QUESTION ***WHAT IS LIFETIME HEALTH COVER?***

ANSWER Lifetime health cover rules provide lower private health insurance premiums for people with long term membership of their health funds, compared with those who join later in life. Discuss with your fund the impact of these rules on the premiums you pay for private health insurance, particularly if you are considering cancelling your insurance.

The lifetime health cover rules do not apply to people born before 1 July 1934.

QUESTION ***WHAT IS THE MEDICAL EXPENSES TAX OFFSET?***

ANSWER You can claim a tax offset of 20% of your net medical expenses once they have exceeded \$2,060. There is no general upper limit of what you can claim though the Government has limited the offsets on some individual items.

QUESTION ***CAN MY FAMILY GET ANY HELP WHEN I DIE?***

ANSWER A Bereavement Payment may be paid to your partner to provide short term assistance to help your partner adjust to changed financial circumstances.

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR THE ELDERLY

QUESTION ***HOW CAN THE COMMONWEALTH CARELINK CENTRE HELP MEET MY HEALTH NEEDS AND ASSIST ME TO LIVE INDEPENDENTLY?***

ANSWER Carelink is a Federal Government aged care initiative that provides a free, single contact point for information about local community care and health services.

Suncare Community Service Inc operates Commonwealth Carelink centres at:
4/31 Main Street, Pialba, Hervey Bay 4655 and
85/91 Sugar Road Maroochydore 4558
and can be contacted on 1800 052 222 or on the internet at
www.commcarelink.health.gov.au.

The Commonwealth Carelink Centre has an up to date database of information about a range of agencies providing community care, support, health and aged services in the region, including Home and Community Care and Community Aged Care packages.

COMMONWEALTH CARER RESPITE SERVICES

QUESTION ***HOW CAN I OBTAIN RESPITE CARE?***

ANSWER Commonwealth Carer Respite Centres coordinate access to respite services in your local area.

They can give you advice about respite services and find the service closest to you. They can also help you to access the right respite services.

Commonwealth Carer Respite Centres work with carers to plan sensible approaches to respite and other support needs and also arrange 24 hour emergency respite care. For further information call 1800 052 222.

PENSIONER CONCESSION CARD

QUESTION **WHO CAN GET THE PENSIONER CONCESSION CARD?**

ANSWER The Pensioner Concession Card is issued annually to all pensioners including those receiving Age Pension, Parenting Payment, Disability Support Pension and Bereavement Allowance.

People aged over 60 who have been continuously receiving one (or a combination) of the following payments for more than nine months can also receive the card: Newstart Allowance, Sickness Allowance, Widow Allowance, Partner Allowance, Parenting Allowance or Special Benefit.

QUESTION **WHAT MAY MY CONCESSION CARD ENTITLE ME TO?**

ANSWER Reduced prices for prescription items through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme at chemist shops, \$5.60 per PBS item and free after 60 prescriptions for concessional patients. For more information call the PBS on 1800 020 613.

An increase in benefits for out of pocket, out of hospital medical expenses above a certain threshold through the Medicare Safety Net.

Hearing aids through the Office of Hearing Services. An annual fee may apply for maintenance and batteries. For more information call 1800 500 726.

Card holders are allowed four single or two return economy rail trips within Queensland each year. An administration fee is applicable. Telephone 1800 872 467.

Free eye examinations with optometrists who bulk bill and free supply of glasses from a range of standard frames with lenses as clinically required (contact Queensland Health).

Free dental treatment from public dental hospitals and clinics including the supply of free dentures (clinics in the Yellow Pages).

Discounted mail redirection fees.

Reduction in land leasing and rental fees under certain conditions (contact the Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management call 13 74 68).

PENSIONER CONCESSION CARD (cont'd)

If your card was issued on or after 1 July 1994, a 50% reduction in car registration. (A flat rate concession applies if your card was issued before 1 July 1994.) Conditions apply. (Contact Queensland Transport Customer Service 13 23 80).

50% off Queensland urban and long distance rail travel (normal berth and meal charges apply) plus reduced fares for interstate rail travel.

20% reduction in council general rates up to \$180 per annum for principal place of residence (includes rural fire services levy). Apply at your council office.

An electricity bill reduction of up to \$230.46 per year, apply through your electricity supplier. Conditions may apply.

Exemption of payment of half the registration component of registration for one recreational boat and a 10% discount on the cost of the stocked impoundment permit required to fish in specific dams throughout Queensland.

The Electricity Life Support Concession Scheme provides \$39.12 per month per machine for eligible users of an oxygen concentrator or \$26.20 per month for users of kidney dialysis machines. (Paid quarterly). Contact the Queensland Department of Communities 13 74 68.

A Telephone Allowance of \$25.20 (or \$37.80 with an internet connection) per quarter. This is paid as part of the Pension Supplement.

Some doctors will bulk bill patients in receipt of this card.

Concessions on TAFE courses, adult community education courses, State Art Gallery, Museum, Library etc.

Access to subsidies for the provision of endorsed aids for Queensland residents with permanent or stabilised disabilities.

These concession details are valid in Queensland, however they may change from time to time.
The concessions vary in other states.

COMMONWEALTH SENIORS HEALTH CARD

QUESTION ***WHAT IS THE COMMONWEALTH SENIORS HEALTH CARD?***

ANSWER The Commonwealth Seniors Health Card gives eligible Australians of Age Pension Age who do not receive a pension access to some concessions.

QUESTION ***WHAT CHANGES HAVE BEEN MADE TO ELIGIBILITY FOR THE COMMONWEALTH SENIORS HEALTH CARD?***

ANSWER The Government now requires all applicants for the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card to provide their Tax File Number to Centrelink.

QUESTION ***WHAT MIGHT THE COMMONWEALTH SENIORS HEALTH CARD ENTITLE ME TO?***

ANSWER Reduced prices for prescription items through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme at chemist shops, generally \$5.60 per item. You may also need to present your Medicare Card when you purchase PBS medicines.

Bulk-billed GP appointments, at the discretion of the GP (the Australian Government provides financial incentives for GP's to bulk bill concession card holders).

The Seniors Supplement, \$837.20 a year for singles and \$631.80 a year for a card holder who is partnered. This payment incorporates the former Seniors Concession Allowance and the higher rate of the former Telephone Allowance.

The Seniors Supplement is paid quarterly in March, June, September and December each year.

QUESTION ***HOW MUCH CAN I EARN BEFORE I AM NOT ELIGIBLE FOR THE SENIORS HEALTH CARD?***

ANSWER The income limits are \$50,000 (single) and \$80,000 (couple) per annum (higher for couples separated by illness or with dependent children). These figures are not indexed but there is no assets test.

QUEENSLAND SENIORS CARD

QUESTION **WHO CAN RECEIVE THE QUEENSLAND SENIORS CARD?**

ANSWER All permanent Queensland residents who are over 65 years of age and work less than 35 hours per week.

Permanent residents between the ages of 60 and 64 (inclusive) who work less than 35 hours a week and hold a concession card from Centrelink or Veterans Affairs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT 13 74 68 OR THE QUEENSLAND DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES ON 13 13 04.
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QUESTION **WHAT MAY MY QUEENSLAND SENIORS CARD ENTITLE ME TO?**

ANSWER Exemption from paying the community ambulance levy on your principal place of residence.

Free dental treatment at public dental clinics.

Subsidies for medical aids and equipment.

A concession is available on Queensland urban and long distance travel services.

If your card was issued on or after 1 July 1994 a 50% reduction in car registration. (A flat rate concession applies if your card was issued before 1 July 1994.) Conditions apply. Contact Queensland Transport Customer Service 13 23 80.

The Electricity Life Support Concession Scheme provides \$39.12 per month per machine for eligible users of an oxygen concentrator or \$26.20 per month for users of kidney dialysis machines. (Paid quarterly). Contact the Queensland Department of Communities 13 74 68.

Access to subsidies for the provision of endorsed aids for Queensland residents with permanent or stabilised disabilities.

20% discount on the Urban Fire Levy. Some councils offer additional discounts for the Rural Fire Services Levy.

Exemption of payment of half the registration for one recreational boat and a 10% discount on the cost of the stocked impoundment permit required to fish in specific dams throughout Queensland.

Reduction in electricity bills of up to \$230.46 per year. Conditions apply. Apply through your electricity supplier.

QUEENSLAND SENIORS BUSINESS DISCOUNTS CARD

QUESTION ***WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR THE QUEENSLAND SENIORS BUSINESS DISCOUNT CARD AND WHAT MAY IT ENTITLE ME TO?***

ANSWER All permanent Queensland residents who are over 60 years of age, irrespective of means or employment may apply. The card offers business discounts provided by participating businesses throughout Australia. Telephone 13 74 68 for more information.

HELPFUL INFORMATION FOR SENIORS

Seniors Enquiry Line

The Seniors Enquiry Line can give you information on a range of topics including: concessions, social activities, household assistance, retirement accommodation, financial and legal matters, health, education and transport.

They also produce a monthly newsletter and their website www.seniorsenquiryline.com.au has information on upcoming activities around Queensland. Telephone 1300 135 500.

Senior Shopper Service

The Senior Shopper Service is an independent telephone shopping service that is available for free for people with a Seniors Card or Seniors Business Discount Card. The service aims to get the best price on various goods and services for cardholders.

Visit the website www.seniorshopper.com.au or telephone 1300 366 265.

Taxi Subsidy Scheme

Queensland Transport runs the Taxi Subsidy Scheme which offers a 50% concession on taxi travel for people with disabilities. To be eligible for the scheme, a person must have a severe disability and live in Queensland. There is a maximum subsidy of \$25 for each trip, and only one voucher can be used.

Members are entitled to a maximum of 20 interstate travel vouchers per year. Telephone 1300 134 755.

APPEALS

QUESTION ***WHAT CAN I DO IF I AM UNHAPPY WITH A CENTRELINK DECISION?***

ANSWER If you disagree with a decision made by Centrelink regarding your entitlement to a pension or benefit you may ask for a review of the decision.

QUESTION ***WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR REVIEWS AND APPEALS?***

ANSWER There are four review and appeal procedures.

- 1) Local office review – the person who made the decision explains and discusses the decision with you.
- 2) Review by conducted by an authorised review officer – a senior staff officer examines the disputed decision.
- 3) Social Security Appeals Tribunal – an independent body considers an appeal against the decision.
- 4) Administrative Appeals Tribunal – a more formal tribunal to resolve disputes between Government agencies and individuals.

QUESTION ***CAN THE OMBUDSMAN ASSIST ME WITH MY COMPLAINT?***

ANSWER The Commonwealth Ombudsman can investigate complaints about the administrative actions of Centrelink. Complaints can be made by phone on 1300 362 072, by writing to GPO Box 442, CANBERRA ACT 2601 or online at www.ombudsman.gov.au.

OTHER MATTERS

AUSTRALIAN FLAGS



My office is able to provide an Australian Flag, the Aboriginal Flag, the Torres Strait Islander Flag, a portrait of Her Majesty the Queen, the Australian Coat of Arms, music sheets and CDs and DVDs of the National Anthem to eligible organisations.

Each organisation is entitled to one Flag every seven years, although consideration is given to earlier requests where weather or other factors may have made the Flag unusable.

Individuals may also receive the portrait of the Queen, Australian Coat of Arms, and the music sheets and CDs and DVDs of the National Anthem. Individuals may also request an Australian Flag from a limited allocation available to my office.

CONGRATULATORY MESSAGES

Congratulatory messages can be arranged for special anniversaries, e.g. 50 or 60 years of marriage, 90th and 100th birthdays. Messages from the Queen can be arranged for 60 years of marriage and 100th birthdays.

Please write to me with details at least three weeks before the anniversary. Where a message is to be sent from the Queen at least five weeks prior notice is required.

Where possible, a copy of the birth or marriage certificate should be supplied, otherwise a Statutory Declaration is to be provided.

VACCINATIONS FOR SENIORS

Flu is caused by a virus which is passed from person to person by coughing or sneezing or direct contact. It can lead to illness more severe than that caused by other respiratory viruses, such as the common cold. Some people, especially those over 65 years and those with chronic medical conditions, can suffer complications from the flu.

The flu vaccine is a very important way to help protect you from the influenza virus. The best time to be vaccinated is Autumn, before the outbreak of the flu in Winter. The vaccine is free for people who are over 65 and is available from your medical practitioner or through your local health centre.

The Australian Government also provides free pneumococcal vaccinations for seniors.

IF I CAN HELP YOU

I visit all parts of the Wide Bay electorate regularly and these visits are often advertised in the local press. Alternatively, you are welcome to write or phone my office if ever I can be of assistance in matters controlled by the Federal Government.



WARREN TRUSS MP

Federal Member for Wide Bay
Leader of The Nationals

PO Box 283 (319 Kent Street)
MARYBOROUGH 4650

Telephone: 4121 2936 or 1300 301 968
Facsimile: 4122 3968

E-mail: W.Truss.MP@aph.gov.au
Internet: www.warrentruss.com



CONTACTS FOR CENTRELINK

www.centrelink.gov.au

MARYBOROUGH

207 Lennox St
MARYBOROUGH 4650

HERVEY BAY

6-10 Hunter Street
PIALBA 4655

GYMPIE

27 O'Connell Street
GYMPIE 4570

KINGAROY

21 Markwell Street
KINGAROY 4610

NOOSAVILLE

Noosa Civic
28 Eenie Creek Road
NOOSAVILLE 4566

Telephone Number	Centrelink Service
13 1021	Appointments
13 2300	Retirement
13 6357	National Seminar Booking Service
13 2850	Newstart and other allowances
13 2717	Carer and disability related payments
13 6150	Family Assistance Office
13 1202	Multi-lingual service
1800 810 586	TTY - Payment Inquiries
1800 050 004	Customer relations, complaints, compliments, feedback
1800 000 567	Teletypewriter (TTY) for hearing and speech impaired - Customer Service

OTHER USEFUL NUMBERS

1800 020 613
13 2861

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme
Australian Taxation Office

Authorised and printed by Warren Truss MP 319 Kent Street Maryborough QLD 4650