

The Age Pension Guide

April 2010

WARREN TRUSS

Federal Member for Wide Bay



*Working
for Wide Bay*



Warren Truss MP
Federal Member for Wide Bay
Leader of The Nationals



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.

In its 2009 Budget, the Federal Labor Government announced a number of changes to the Age Pension. At last they acted to match the Coalition's commitment to make a significant increase in the base rate of the single Age Pension which has been below acceptable standards.

A new Pension Supplement payment replaces the GST Supplement and the Pharmaceutical, Telephone and Utilities Allowances.

Single Age Pensioners on the full rate will now receive an additional \$30.00 per week in the base pension and \$2.49 per week in the Pension Supplement payment. Age Pensioner couples on the full rate will receive \$10.14 per week in the Pension Supplement payment. However, the Government has toughened the eligibility test which will result in lower pensions for some new applicants. There will be a fortnightly earnings assessment for people with variable income. The eligibility age for the Pension will go up from 2017.

Many Seniors tell me that they are concerned about the massive level of debt and deficit that the Labor Government is creating and the pressure this will place on household budgets, funding for Government services and interest rates.

The Federal Government's 2009 Budget forecast a record \$58 billion deficit and Government debt to blow out to an unprecedented \$315 billion. These borrowings will place significant pressure on interest rates as the Government competes with State Governments and the private sector for finance. Interest and redemption repayments on the debt will eat into funds that could otherwise be available for future expenditure 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

Table of Contents

AGE PENSION.....	4
PENSION PAY DAY.....	4
OVERSEAS TRAVEL.....	4
INCOME AND ASSET TESTS, TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS	5
INCOME TEST.....	5
WORK BONUS SCHEME	5
TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS	6
ASSETS TEST.....	7
GIFTING.....	9
PENSION SUPPLEMENT	10
CENTREPAY	12
LOANS OR ADVANCES.....	12
INCOME TAX, INVESTMENTS AND DEEMING	13
INVESTMENTS AND DEEMING.....	14
PENSION AGE.....	16
PENSION BONUS SCHEME	17
RENT ASSISTANCE.....	18
OTHER SUPPLEMENTS, PAYMENTS AND ALLOWANCES	19
CARER SUPPLEMENT	19
CARER PAYMENT	19
CARER ALLOWANCE.....	20
PARTNER ALLOWANCE	20
CARE FOR THE ELDERLY	21
AGED CARE ASSISTANCE.....	21
HEALTH CARE AND CONCESSION CARDS.....	23
PRIVATE HEALTH CARE	23
SUPPORT SERVICES FOR THE ELDERLY	24
COMMONWEALTH CARER RESPITE SERVICES.....	24
PENSIONER CONCESSION CARD	25
COMMONWEALTH SENIORS HEALTH CARD.....	27
QUEENSLAND SENIORS CARD.....	28
QUEENSLAND SENIORS BUSINESS DISCOUNTS CARD	29
HELPFUL GUIDES FOR PENSIONERS.....	30
APPEALS.....	31
OTHER MATTERS	32
IF I CAN HELP YOU	32

AGE PENSION

AGE PENSION RATES

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

ANSWER

	Per week	Per fortnight	Per year
Single Pensioner	\$322.10	\$644.20	\$16,749.20
Pensioner Couple (each person)	\$242.80	\$485.60	\$12,625.60

The above figures do not include the pension supplement.

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 calculated using rises in either 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 September 2010.

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 ***THE FEDERAL LABOR GOVERNMENT HAS MADE CHANGES TO THE PENSION INCOME TEST. WHAT CHANGES HAVE BEEN MADE?***

ANSWER The Government has increased the rate at which other income reduces the pension from 40 cents in the dollar to 50 cents in the dollar for singles. For couples, it has changed from 20 cents each in the dollar to 25 cents each in the dollar.

QUESTION ***UNDER THE NEW 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	\$142.00	\$3,692.00
	PENSIONER COUPLE (combined income)	\$248.00	\$6,448.00
Pension cuts out completely when your income is more than	SINGLE PENSIONER	\$1,544.20	\$40,149.20
	PENSIONER COUPLE (combined income)	\$2,362.00	\$61,412.00

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

QUESTION ***WHAT HAPPENS IF MY INCOME IS GREATER THAN \$142.00 ALLOWABLE INCOME (\$248.00 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 new Work Bonus provides an incentive for pensioners over Age Pension age to participate in the workforce. Under the Work Bonus, half of the first \$500 of employment income earned per fortnight will be disregarded under the income test. There is no need to apply for the scheme, but pensioners will need to inform Centrelink of their earnings.

TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

QUESTION *I HAVE RECEIVED A LETTER FROM CENTRELINK TELLING ME MY PENSION WILL BE 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.

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

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

QUESTION *I WILL BE PAID UNDER THE NEW TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS, WILL I RECEIVE A PENSION INCREASE?*

ANSWER The transitional rate is based on the Age Pension rules and payment rates that applied before 20 September 2009. The transitional rate of pension includes \$20.30 as a pension increase for singles and \$20.30 for couples combined. This new transitional rate will continue to be subject to Consumer Price Index (CPI) increases in March and September but it will not benefit from the new Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index.

QUESTION *HOW LONG WILL A PERSON BE ASSESSED UNDER THE TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS?*

ANSWER The transitional rules will only apply while the pension under the transitional arrangements is higher than the pension they would otherwise receive under the new changes to the income test from 20 September 2009. Once a person's pension entitlement is the same or higher under the new rules, their pension will be calculated according to the new rules permanently.

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	\$142.00	\$3,692.00
	PENSIONER COUPLE (combined income)	\$248.00	\$6,448.00
Pension cuts out completely when your income is more than	SINGLE PENSIONER	\$1,727.75	\$44,921.50
	PENSIONER COUPLE (combined income)	\$2,809.50	\$73,047.00

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)
- Pre-paid funeral expenses up to \$10,000
- Any 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. Which ever 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...	\$178,000#	\$252,500#
Pension cuts out completely when you have assets worth more than...	\$645,500	\$957,500*

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...	\$307,000#	\$381,500#
Pension cuts out completely when you have assets worth more than...	\$774,500	\$1,086,500*

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...	\$178,000#	\$252,500#
Pension cuts out completely when you have assets worth more than...	\$601,000	\$936,000*

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...	\$307,000#	\$381,500#
Pension cuts out completely when you have assets worth more than...	\$730,000	\$1,065,000*

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 \$129,000 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 the farm land and it would be unreasonable for them 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 new payment which combines the former GST Supplement, Pharmaceutical Allowance, Telephone Allowance and the Utilities Allowance. The new payment is made fortnightly with the regular Pension payment.

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

ANSWER

	Per fortnight (minimum)	Per fortnight (maximum)
Single Pensioner	\$30.60	\$56.90
Pensioner couple (each person)	\$23.10	\$42.90

QUESTION **WHO WILL RECEIVE THE PENSION SUPPLEMENT?**

ANSWER The Pension Supplement is included in the rate for 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 included in their transitional rate amount.

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

ANSWER The Pension Supplement has been included automatically as part of regular fortnightly income support payments from 20 September 2009. You do not need to apply for the Pension Supplement.

From 1 July 2010, you will be able to 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 amount of the Pension Supplement.

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 AM ELIGIBLE FOR THE NEW PENSION SUPPLEMENT. WHEN WILL MY UTILITIES ALLOWANCE AND TELEPHONE ALLOWANCE STOP?***

ANSWER Your last payments of Telephone Allowance and Utilities Allowance were made in September 2009.

QUESTION ***I WILL BE PAID UNDER THE TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS. WILL MY UTILITIES ALLOWANCE AND TELEPHONE ALLOWANCE STOP?***

ANSWER Your last payments of Telephone Allowance and Utilities Allowance were made in September 2009. This is because the value of these payments is being included in the new fortnightly transitional rate of payment that you received from 20 September 2009.

QUESTION ***I RECEIVE 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) include 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.

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 \$500. This advance will then be recovered, interest free, from your pension payments over the next 13 fortnights.

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 2009 the maximum tax offset available is \$2,230 for single senior Australians and \$1,062 for each member of a couple.

This measure allows single senior Australians to have an income of \$29,867 without paying tax. Senior couples are able to have income of up to \$ 25,680 each without paying tax. The tax offset cuts out at \$47,707 for a single pensioner and \$38,496 for each member of a couple (higher if living apart because of illness).

As of 1 July 2009, senior Australians do not pay a Medicare Levy until they reach an income of \$29,867 (singles) or \$43,500 (couples - combined income). For more information call Medicare Australia – 13 20 11.

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

ANSWER From 1 July 2009, the low income offset increased to \$1,350. 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 \$63,750 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 dedicated Seniors Tax Hotline on 13 28 61 and at the first prompt press 1.

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 \$42,000 OVER \$42,000	3% 4.5%
Pensioner Couple (both receiving a pension or one person receiving the pension and the other receiving a living allowance)	FIRST \$70,000 OVER \$70,000	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	\$96,044
Pensioner Couple (combined income)	\$166,622

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 to 31 December 1945	63 and 6 months
1 January 1946 to 30 June 1974	64
1 July 1947 to 31 December 1948	64 and 6 months
1 January 1949 to 1 July 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 2009 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	\$1,623.10	\$1,227.40
2 Years	\$6,492.20	\$4,909.50
3 Years	\$14,607.50	\$11,046.40
4 Years	\$25,969.00	\$19,638.00
5 Years	\$40,576.50	\$30,684.40

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	\$113.40	\$107.00
Minimum rent before Rent Assistance is paid	\$100.80	\$164.40
Maximum Rent Assistance is paid when rent is more than	\$252.00	\$307.07

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 SUPPLEMENT

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

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

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

Carer Supplement, currently \$600 for each person being cared for, was paid before the end of June 2009 and will be paid every year from 1 July 2010.

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 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 \$106.70 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 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.

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 2009 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 \$1500. There is no upper limit of what you can claim though the Government plans limits 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 052 052 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, \$5.30 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 from Australian 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 13 22 32.

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 Department of Natural Resources and Mines).

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 \$190.00 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 \$32.39 per month per machine for eligible users of an oxygen concentrator or \$21.69 per month for users of kidney dialysis machines. (Paid quarterly). Contact the Queensland Department of Communities 1800 460 849.

A Telephone Rental Allowance of \$23.40 (or \$35.20 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.

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

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

Note:	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.

A proposed change that would have included reportable superannuation contributions as part of the income test to determine eligibility for the card was defeated in the Parliament.

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 \$5.30 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, \$795.60 a year for singles and \$600.60 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 will be paid quarterly in March, June, September and December each year. The first payment was made from 20 December 2009.

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). 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 ON THE QUEENSLAND SENIORS CARD CONTACT 1800 175 500 OR THE QUEENSLAND DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES ON 13 13 04.

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 \$32.39 per month per machine for eligible users of an oxygen concentrator or \$21.69 per month for users of kidney dialysis machines. (Paid quarterly). Contact the Queensland Department of Communities 1800 460 849.

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 \$190.00 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 13 04 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.

HELPFUL GUIDES FOR PENSIONERS

QUESTION ***WHAT OTHER INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE FOR PENSIONERS?***

ANSWER Centrelink has a range of free publications available to pensioners. These include:

NEWS FOR SENIORS

Mailed to all Age Pensioners. DVA Service Pensioners and Commonwealth Seniors Health Card holders.

HOME AND RESIDENCE CHOICES

A guide about the different care and accommodation choices available.

WHAT TO DO WHEN SOMEONE DIES

A guide to help you deal with this difficult time

INVESTING MONEY – YOUR CHOICES

A guide to the basics of investing safely

AUSTRALIAN RETIREE – YOUR CHOICES

Information about programs, concessions and services for self funded retirees.

UNDERSTANDING RETIREMENT INCOME STREAMS

Explains retirement income streams in detail.

MOVING HOUSE – YOUR CHOICES

Information to help you decide whether you should move or stay put.

To obtain these guides call 13 23 00

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 picture 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, etc. 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, 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 Mall
28 Eenie Creek Road
NOOSAVILLE 4566

13 1021	Appointments
13 2300	Retirement
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

CENTRELINK FINANCIAL INFORMATION SERVICE OFFICERS

Maryborough	(07) 4121 1076
Cooloola/ Burnett	(07) 5481 0181
Sunshine Coast	(07) 5420 6037
National Seminar Booking Service	13 6357

OTHER USEFUL NUMBERS

1800 020 613	Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme
13 2861	Australian Taxation Office

This material has been produced by Warren Truss using his printing and communications entitlement
Authorised and printed by Warren Truss MP 319 Kent Street Maryborough QLD 4650