

Circular HSS (PCD) 1/2017

Primary Care Directorate

General Dental and Ophthalmic Services Branch
Room D3, Castle Buildings, Belfast, BT4 3SQ



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte
Máinnystrie O Poustie

www.health-ni.gov.uk

Chief Executive of the Business Services Organisation
Chief Executive of the Health and Social Care Board
Chief Executive of each Health and Social Care Trust
All Dental and Ophthalmic Advisors

Tel: 028 9052 2267

Fax: 028 9076 5621

Email: Bryan.Dooley@health-ni.gov.uk

Date: 25 September 2017

UNIVERSAL CREDIT AND HELP WITH HEALTH COSTS

1. This circular gives details regarding interim arrangements for providing help under the Department's Help with Health Costs Scheme following the introduction of Universal Credit in Northern Ireland on 27th September 2017.
2. The Department has recently consulted on proposals to introduce an additional criterion in the form of earning thresholds for UC recipients as a means of passporting individuals to automatic help under the Department's Help with Health Costs Scheme. Officials are currently considering the responses received on the eligibility proposals with the view to implementing a preferred option. Full details of any changes that are likely to be introduced as a consequence of the consultation will be provided in further Memorandums.
3. However, in the interim, and until we are in a position to legislate for any new eligibility criteria for UC recipients, the Department is planning to use the Health Service Low Income Scheme to offer the necessary protection to those very small numbers who will be in receipt of UC when it is first rolled out. The attached Memorandum deals with the issue of alerting practitioners and HSC staff to these interim arrangements.

ACTION

4. The Business Services Organisation (BSO) is asked to arrange for a copy of the Memorandum to be sent to all General Dental Practitioners, Opticians and Ophthalmic Medical Practitioners and provided to all members of the respective Dental and Ophthalmic Committees of the BSO.
5. The Health and Social Care Board and the HSC Trusts are asked to ensure that all relevant staff and Departments, including their Finance Officers, are informed of the relevant parts of this circular, including the Memorandum.

ENQUIRIES

6. Any enquiries from the BSO, the HSCB or the HSC Trusts about this circular should be made to General Dental and Ophthalmic Services Branch, Room D3, Castle Buildings, Belfast BT4 3SQ or by telephone on 028 90520014.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bryan Dooley', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Bryan Dooley
Assistant Director of Primary Care Directorate

Enc.

Memorandum to Circular HSS (PCD) 1/2017
UNIVERSAL CREDIT AND HELP WITH HEALTH COSTS

Universal Credit is the new single payment system which is being introduced in Northern Ireland from 27th September 2017 on phased geographical basis. Universal Credit will replace the old income- related benefits¹ and will be a new payment for those people aged 18 or over and under State Pension age who are looking for work or on low incomes. As Universal Credit is being introduced stage-by-stage and in different geographical areas, even when it becomes available in specific areas, not everyone will be able to access it immediately. The aim is for Universal Credit to be offered in all Social Security/Jobs and Benefits offices in Northern Ireland by the end of September 2018².

The Department of Health has recently consulted on proposals to introduce an additional criterion in the form of earning thresholds for UC recipients as a means of passporting individuals to automatic help under the Department's Help with Health Costs Scheme. Officials are currently considering the responses received from the consultation but in the interim the Department is planning to use the Health Service Low Income Scheme to offer the necessary protection to those very small numbers who will be in receipt of Universal Credit when it is first rolled out.

This memorandum deals with the issue of alerting practitioners, practice staff and HSC staff of these interim arrangements to allow for the passporting of Universal Credit recipients to exemption from dental and ophthalmic costs and the remission of costs for travelling to and from hospital on referral. Other entitlements such as age and medical conditions which currently attract exemption or remission from charges remain unchanged.

Evidence

Those very small number of individuals who will be in receipt of Universal Credit when it is first rolled out will have to rely on an application under the Health Service Low Income Scheme to receive any help with the cost of their healthcare. The Low Income Scheme³ is means tested using similar rules to that currently used to determine Income Support eligibility with successful applicants then receiving a certificate that entitles them to either full (HC2 certificate) or partial (HC3 certificate) remission from health costs for a 12 month period.

If the Universal Credit recipient cannot produce evidence of entitlement in the form of either a HC2 or HC3 certificate when presenting themselves for HS care and treatment, the practitioner should still provide the HS care the patient needs and, as with other entitlements, should put a cross in the "Evidence Not Seen" option on the respective treatment form. As previously and with other entitlements, the responsibility will then be on the patient to declare that they are in receipt of a HS Low Income Scheme certificate, by ticking and signing the appropriate treatment/claim forms and showing proof of eligibility – patients should be made aware of their responsibility to determine the accuracy of the declaration they make.

¹ Benefits that are being replaced by Universal Credit include income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Working Tax Credit, Tax Credit and Housing Benefit.

² See <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/universal-credit>

³ See <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/help-with-health-costs>

The Business Services Organisation has a responsibility to check for exemption fraud and patients found to have wrongly claimed full or partial exemption from HS charges, could face a penalty charge. Patients should be made aware that the penalty charge is a civil fine of five times the amount owed up to a maximum of £100. This is in addition to the original charge. Patients should also be made aware that payment will be pursued by civil recovery through the courts if necessary.

Other benefits

As the new system is being rolled out in phased geographical stages, the old benefit entitlements will continue to be valid for HS eligibility (if in date) in an area where Universal Credit has not yet been introduced. Practitioners, practice staff and HSC staff may therefore see some patients with old benefit entitlements and some with Universal Credit entitlements. No patient should have both however and, if they do, in-date Universal Credit takes precedence and the requirement for the patient to have Low Income Scheme certificate to claim exemption or remission from costs then exists.

Enquiries

Any enquiries arising from this memorandum should be directed to the Business Services Organisation in the first instance