

UNIVERSAL CREDIT: CHANGES TO ENTITLEMENT FOR FREE NHS DENTAL TREATMENT, AND NHS OPTICAL VOUCHERS AND CONTACT LENSES

Introduction

1. This Memorandum advises of the introduction of take-home pay thresholds implemented from 1st November 2015 for claimants on Universal Credit to be entitled to free NHS dental treatment and GOS vouchers to help towards the cost of glasses or contact lenses.

Background

2. In April 2013 the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) introduced a new benefit called Universal Credit (UC). UC aims to simplify the benefit system by bringing together the current working age benefits for those in and out of work together into a single payment system. UC has been piloted in a number of areas, including jobcentres in Inverness. Roll-out of UC continues to be limited but we expect that progress towards full roll out will continue over the next few years.

Changes to Entitlement for UC Claimants

3. Previously all claimants in receipt of Universal Credit were entitled to free NHS dental treatment and GOS vouchers to help towards the cost of glasses or contact lenses. This was a temporary measure and reflected the pilot stage of UC.

4. From 1st November new take-home pay thresholds apply for UC claimants. In view of the increasing roll out of UC over the next few years, these thresholds are designed to ensure that people already receiving passported benefits continue to qualify under UC, but costs do not escalate as a result of widening the entitlement criteria. The specific take-home pay for a claimant is:

- Up to £435 per month;
- Up to £945 per month (if you are responsible for a child, or have limited capability for work).

Changes to GP17 and GP17 (PR) Forms

5. There are planned changes to both GP17 and GP17(PR) forms, with a target date of 1st April 2016. For non-EDI practices, the GP17 form will be updated to include a specific box for UC. For EDI practices an equivalent change will be made to the GP17(PR) form.

6. In the meantime until the forms are appropriately updated, for a UC claimant, the box for 'Income-based Job Seekers Allowance' should continue to be used.

Changes to the GOS(S)3 and GOS(S)4 Forms

7. Similar to above, there are planned changes to the GOS(S)3 and GOS(S)4 forms to include a specific box for UC, with a target date of 1st April 2016. Changes have been made to the eOphthalmics payment system to ensure Universal Credit is included as an option on the web form.

8. In the meantime until the forms are appropriately updated, for a UC claimant, the box for 'Income-based Job Seekers Allowance' should continue to be used.

Proof of UC Entitlement/Measures to Prevent Fraud

9. Under the new take-home pay thresholds DWP will issue claimants with the appropriate award letter that will confirm their entitlement to free NHS dental care and GOS vouchers towards the cost of glasses or contact lenses.

10. The dentist, optometrist or member of the practice team should ask the claimant for a copy of their award letter from DWP. Where the patient is unable to produce evidence of entitlement to free NHS dental or GOS vouchers towards the cost of glasses or contact lenses, then the box 'Evidence not produced' on the GP17, GP17 (PR), GOS(S)3 and GOS(S)4 forms should be marked with an 'X'. The patient should be treated as if they are in receipt of universal credit.

11. The same advice applies to all claims for exemption. It is important that the dentist or optician does not presume exemption or advise the patient that they are exempt. The Patient Claims Team of Counter Fraud Services is the appropriate contact point for dentists or opticians on entitlement exemption from NHS charges. If you receive any queries regarding exemption, you can contact the team on 0345 601 2912.

12. Any enquires about this Memorandum should be taken up with your NHS Board.

Scottish Government Health and Social Care
13 Nov 2015