

Social Welfare

The world of social welfare can be very confusing! Especially for someone who has never been through the process of applying for welfare support in the past.

This guide will give you an insight into the range of Social Welfare Payments available to those living with a long-term illness or disability and will give you a few helpful hints and tips to consider when making your applications.

For professional advice and support please contact your local Citizens Information Office or visit www.citizensinformation.ie (information about social welfare payments for short-term illness is also available online)

The Basics

Who provides these payments?

A range of Social Welfare Payments are available to support those who are likely to suffer financial hardship as a result of a long term illness or disability. These are made either by the Department of Social Protection or the Health Service Executive (HSE).

Do I qualify?

Some illness/disability payments are available for short periods of illness while others are designed to meet the needs of individuals/parents/carers dealing with a more long-term condition (*long term is usually defined as a condition that lasts for more than one year*). You will only qualify for these benefits if a Doctor is willing to confirm your condition. Some payments will require you to have a medical assessment.

If you are applying for social welfare payments on behalf of someone else or as a carer it is essential that the individual you are claiming on behalf of, or caring for, has been assessed by a Doctor who will be able to confirm their condition.

What about my income?

Most payments require a means test (an assessment of your ability to financially support yourself) and are based on your PRSI (Pay Related Social Insurance) contributions. If you do not have enough PRSI contributions you may qualify for a Social Assistance Payment.

Advice tailored to your financial situation is available from you local Citizens Information Office.

I've only just moved to Ireland, can I apply for support?

In order to qualify for Social Welfare payments you must be habitually resident in Ireland. To be considered an 'habitual resident' a person must provide evidence that they have been living in Ireland for some time and intend to stay in Ireland for the foreseeable future – if you are asked to provide proof of habitual residence please seek advice from the office requiring this evidence. Utility bills, pay slips, bank statements etc. may be sufficient.

What social welfare payments are available and how do I apply?

If you have recently become unwell or you have a long-term condition you may require more help and support with daily tasks than an average person of your age. Similarly, if you have a child who is unwell you may find yourself taking on a new role as a carer which will result in you spending more and more time away from your usual activities.

Living with long-term illness or disability can result in individuals being unable to remain in fulltime education or employment. This, in addition to the added expense of travel to and from hospital appointments, additional heating/electricity costs etc. can result in a situation where families struggle to support themselves financially.

Finding yourself in financial difficulty as a result of ill health is very stressful and it is important that you know where to go for help and support.

The website below is a useful resource for identifying support services during times when you feel unable to cope.

http://www.yourmentalhealth.ie/support_services/

The State is able to offer financial support to families in a range of different ways to help make ends meet. The following are just some of the Social Welfare payments available within Ireland:

(A) Invalidity Pension

This is a weekly payment for those who are **permanently** unable to work because of a long term illness or disability. You must attend a **medical assessment** to qualify for this payment and you will only be eligible if you are **covered by Social Insurance (PRSI)**.

For more information about eligibility criteria please contact your local Citizens Information Office.

How to apply:

- Download this form: <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Forms/Documents/inv1.pdf>
- Contact the Social Welfare Services Office:

Invalidity Pension Section,

Social Welfare Services Office,
Government Buildings,
Ballinalee Road,
Longford,
Ireland.
Tel: (043) 334 0000
Locall: 1890 92 77 70

- Speak with your social worker or GP

(B) Domiciliary Care Allowance

This is a non-means tested, monthly payment for a child (under the age of 16 years) who has 'a severe disability requiring continual or continuous care and attention substantially in excess of the care and attention normally required by a child of the same age'.

This payment is designed to support families who are living with a child with a disability. Speak to your doctor, or another healthcare professional involved with your child, about whether or not it would be appropriate for you to apply for this payment.

Please read the following medical eligibility guidelines before making a claim.

<http://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/DCA%20Medical%20Guidelines.pdf>

How to apply:

- Download the following: <http://www.welfare.ie/en/pdf/domcare1.pdf>
- Text 'FORM DCA' followed by your name and address to 51909 (standard test rates apply)
- Contact the Social Welfare Services Office:

Domiciliary Care Allowance
Social Welfare Services Office,
Department of Social Protection,
College Road,
Sligo,
Ireland.
Tel: (071) 915 7100
Locall: 1890 500 000
Homepage: <http://www.welfare.ie>

- Speak with your social worker or GP

(C) Disability Allowance

This is a long-term social welfare payment for those aged 16 - 65 with a disability expected to last for no less than one year. The disability must substantially restrict the individual's ability to do work that would be suitable for someone else of their age, experience and qualifications.

Payments are made weekly and are based on a means test. The individual claiming this benefit may be expected to attend a medical assessment.

How to apply:

- Download the following: <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Forms/Documents/da1.pdf>
- Contact the Social Welfare Services Office:

Disability Allowance Section,
Department of Social Protection,
Social Welfare Services Office,
Government Buildings,
Ballinalee Road,
Longford,
Ireland.

Tel: (043) 334 0000

Locall: 1890 92 77 70

Homepage: <http://www.welfare.ie>

- Speak to your GP or social worker

(D) Carer's Allowance

Carer's Allowance is a payment for individuals on a low income who are looking after a person who needs support because of a long term illness or disability.

You must be:

- living with the individual you are caring for (or be in a position to provide full-time care),
- an habitual resident in Ireland,
- at least 18 years old
- unemployed or engaged in fewer than 15 hours of employment/education

The persons you are caring for must be:

- Over the age of 16 in need of full-time care and attention or
- under 16 years of age and claiming Domiciliary Care Allowance

If you qualify for a Carer's Allowance you may also qualify other social welfare payments to support you with daily activities. These include the household benefits package and a free travel pass. You should contact your local health office or Citizens information Office to get information tailored to your personal situation.

You will automatically receive the Respite Care Grant – a one of payment of €1375 – every June. This payment can be spent as you wish.

How to apply:

- Download the following: <http://www.welfare.ie/en/pdf/cr1.pdf>
- Contact the Social Welfare Services Office:
Department of Social Protection,
Carer's Allowance Section,
Social Welfare Services Office,
Government Buildings,
Ballinalee Road,
Longford,
Ireland.
Tel: (043) 334 0000
Locall: 1890 92 77 70
- Speak to your GP or social worker

Additional payments available to those in receipt of a long-term illness or disability payment

In addition to the main Social Welfare payments that are tailored to meet the needs of individuals living with illness or disability there are a range of payments that are designed to provide additional help and support.

(A) Free Household benefits

The household benefits package is available to both those over 70 and those claiming a range of social welfare payments (including some of the main illness/disability payments). An updated list of qualifying Social welfare payments can be found at: www.citizensinformation.ie.

This payment is designed to support families on low incomes to run their household.

The package includes either

Allowance 1	Allowance 2
The Electricity Allowance or Natural Gas Allowance or Cash Electricity Allowance or Cash Gas Allowance	Free television licence

How to apply:

- Download the following: <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Forms/Documents/hb1.pdf>
- Contact the Social Welfare Services Office:

Department of Social Protection,
Social Welfare Services,
College Road,
Sligo,
Ireland.
Tel: (071) 915 7100
Locall: 1890 500 000
Homepage: <http://www.welfare.ie/>

(B) Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme

This is a weekly allowance for people on very low, or no, income. The payment is designed to support individuals/families in times of exceptional hardship. The payment is only available in completion on a means test.

Other payments including: rent supplement, mortgage interest supplement, back to school allowances, diet supplement, heating supplement, exceptional needs payments and urgent needs payments are also available alongside the basic supplementary welfare allowance as part of the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme. These are payments for individuals and families in exceptional need and will only be made available after consultation with your Community Welfare Officer.

The diet supplement is an important payment for individuals who are on a prescribed diet as a result of a medical condition.

How to apply:

- Download the following: <http://www.welfare.ie/en/pdf/swa1.pdf> (supplementary Welfare Allowance)
- Contact your local health centre and ask to speak with the Community Welfare Officer for your area.

(C) Free Travel pass

If you are 66yrs or older you are eligible for a free travel pass. This pass is also available to those claiming a range of different social welfare payments including Disability allowance, Carer's Allowance, invalidity pension and others.

It is also possible to get a free companion pass if the individual claiming the free travel pass is unable to travel alone.

How to apply:

- Download the following: <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Forms/Documents/ft1.pdf>
- Contact your local Citizens Information Centre
- Contact the Free Travel section of Social Welfare Services: (071) 915 7100
- Speak to you GP or Social Worker

(D) Concessions for disabled drivers and passengers

It is possible to apply for tax relief on the purchase and adaptation of a vehicle to meet the needs of a disabled person. In order to qualify the individual must hold a primary medical certificate which can be applied for via your local health office.

How to apply:

- Download the following: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/vrt/forms/dd1.pdf>
- Ensure the form is returned together with a primary medical certificate

(E) Local authority grants to adapt your home

It is possible to have you home adapted to meet the needs of an individual with a disability (physical, sensory or intellectual). These adaptations might involve making your home wheelchair accessible or adding on additional rooms to support the care of a disabled individual, such as a wheelchair accessible bathroom or bedroom.

You will need to seek advice from an Occupational Therapist and will then need to contact the Housing Office in your Local Authority.

I am finding it very difficult to fill in my social welfare application forms

Filling in medical and Social Welfare forms can be a daunting task.

The aim of these forms is to give assessors a 'snap-shot' of your life to allow them to make a decision about whether or not your illness/condition/disability results in you requiring more help and support than another person of your age. The assessor needs to determine if your condition affects your ability to work and/or results in additional financial strain that you would not otherwise be under.

Here are a few helpful hints and tips that might be helpful when filling in your form:

- **Keep a diary:** Many social welfare forms will ask you to explain your additional needs in some detail. It can be difficult to answer detailed questions about your daily activities. Most of us do not routinely time how long it takes us to walk up the stairs, get out of bed or have a shower. By keeping a diary it will help you to answer the questions both honestly and accurately.
- **Ask those around you for advice:** When you have been ill or lived with a disability for a long time you get used to doing things a little more slowly. Asking those around you how long it takes them to complete a task can help you to identify the areas where you need more support than another person of your age.
- **Describe the support that you need 'most of the time:'** We all have good days and bad days and in our daily life we all try to focus on the positives. When filling in a social Welfare form try not to be a 'hero'! Be honest and describe your difficulties in as much detail as possible.
- **Discuss your application form with a medical professional:** For some social welfare payments your GP (or your main Consultant) may be asked to provide a report about your daily needs. It is important that you have discussed any difficulties you have with your doctor before they receive a request for this information. Your doctor may not be aware of the difficulties that you have with day-to-day tasks so having this recorded will support them in giving as much detail as possible in support of your application.
- **Provide reports:** If you have any hospital, school or social work reports about your needs, or the needs of the person you are applying for, make sure you include these with your application. If you are in contact with any voluntary organisations ask them to provide a report about the support that they provide.
- **Ask for help:** If you have an illness or disability there is likely to be a voluntary organisation that is able to offer support. Have a look online or ask your GP if they can point you in the right direction.

How can I prepare for a medical assessment?

Many social welfare payments will only be awarded following an assessment from a medical practitioner. You will be informed in writing if this is required. In preparation for a visit from a medical assessor you might consider having the following information at hand:

- A list of your most recent appointments
- A list of all your regular medication
- And recent clinic letters and/or reports
- Information sheets about your condition or disability
- An activity diary
- Notes on issues that you feel the medical assessor should be aware of.

Where can I access independent help and support?

The National Advocacy Service (NAS) provides independent, confidential and free advocacy for people with disabilities, amongst other groups. Advocates can advise you in relation to your entitlements and support you in accessing services. The service is funded by the Citizens Information Board.

For information about accessing the National Advocacy Service for your area please contact your local Citizens Information Office.