

Factsheet

Promoting independence, well being and health

Carer's Allowance



April 2016

This factsheet tells you about the main benefit for carers - carer's allowance.

What is carer's allowance?

Carer's allowance is a weekly benefit that you can get if you are looking after an ill or disabled person for at least 35 hours a week. The person you look after must be getting attendance allowance, or the middle or highest rate of disability living allowance (DLA) care component, or either rate of the daily living component of personal independence payment (PIP). If the person you look after does not receive any of these benefits they should seek advice to check if they could qualify.

You do not have to be related to the person you are looking after, or live at the same address, to get carer's allowance. You do not need a national insurance contribution record and your savings are ignored. There is an earnings rule for the claimant (see below), but, if you have a partner, their income does not affect your right to carer's allowance. The benefit is taxable and counts as income for means-tested benefits and tax credits.

You can only get one lot of carer's allowance even if you are looking after more than one person. You can receive the benefit if you are looking after your partner. If you and your partner are both carers, you can both get carer's allowance if you are caring for different people (including each other).

How much is carer's allowance worth?

From April 2016 the weekly rate is £62.10.

Carer's allowance cannot be paid at the same time as some other benefits, such as state pension or contributory employment and support allowance. This is called the 'overlapping benefit rule'. If you can't be paid carer's allowance because of this rule, you have 'underlying entitlement' instead. This means that you may be able to get increased amounts of other benefits – see below for further information.

Will I get carer's allowance?

To qualify for carer's allowance, you must satisfy the following conditions:

- be aged 16 or over
- spend at least 35 hours a week looking after someone who gets attendance allowance, or DLA middle or highest rate care component, or either rate of PIP daily living component
- not be in full-time education; this generally means a course described as full-time by the educational establishment, or a course involving supervised study of 21 hours a week or more - seek advice if in doubt.
- not earn over £110 per week (after tax, national insurance, care costs while you are at work and half of what you pay into your pension)
- have no restrictions on your right to stay in the UK - seek advice if in doubt

- be present in Great Britain, and have been here for at least two out of the last three years
- pass the habitual residence test

How do I claim carer's allowance?

You cannot get carer's allowance until the person you look after has been awarded attendance allowance, DLA or PIP at the appropriate rate. It can take several months for these claims to be processed. However, if you claim carer's allowance within three months of the person you care for getting their decision about attendance allowance, DLA or PIP, you will be paid carer's allowance from the date their benefit started. If you claim later than this, your claim can only be backdated for three months.

Example: Anwar claims attendance allowance on 1 January and gets the decision awarding it on 1 March. His carer has until 1 June to claim carer's allowance. If they claim by then, the benefit will be backdated to 1 January as well. If they leave it until 15 June, carer's allowance will only be backdated to 15 March.

You can claim carer's allowance by:

- phoning the Carer's Allowance Unit: 0345 608 4321 or textphone 0345 604 5312
- downloading a form or applying online at www.gov.uk/carers-allowance/how-to-claim

If you claim carer's allowance, and you are aged between 18 and the women's pension age, you may be offered a work-focused interview at a Jobcentre Plus office, to discuss your prospects of getting into work or training. The work-focused interview is not compulsory if you are only claiming carer's allowance, but, if you or your partner are claiming other benefits as well, you may be obliged to attend.

Can I have time off from caring and still get carer's allowance?

Once you have been caring for a disabled person for a while, you can take a break from caring without losing your carer's allowance. In any six month period you may still be able to get carer's allowance for:

- up to four weeks for holidays or other breaks in caring
- up to twelve weeks, if you go into hospital for at least eight weeks

If the person you care for goes into hospital, your carer's allowance will stop after four weeks, at the same time as their attendance allowance, PIP or DLA stops.

You should tell the relevant benefit offices about any hospital stays, or if the person you look after goes into a care home.

If the person you care for dies, you can get carer's allowance for up to eight weeks following their death (or possibly longer if you have been getting carer's allowance since before 28 October 2002).

What about my national insurance contributions?

If you claim carer's allowance you will be automatically credited with national insurance contributions to help you to qualify for a state pension. Alternatively, if you do not qualify for carer's allowance you can apply for a carer's credit to make these contributions as long as you are caring for at least 20 hours a week. If the person you look after does not get attendance allowance, DLA highest or middle rate care component, or PIP daily living component, you can still apply for carer's credit, but your application must be signed by a health or social care professional.

See www.gov.uk/carers-credit for more information or phone the Carer's Allowance Unit on 0345 608 4321.

Does carer's allowance affect other benefits?

You *cannot* be paid carer's allowance while you are getting at least the same amount from the following benefits (this is known as the *overlapping benefits rule*):

- state pension
- contributory employment and support allowance
- incapacity benefit
- contribution-based jobseeker's allowance
- maternity allowance
- bereavement allowance or widowed parent's allowance

If your partner gets an addition for you as their dependant as part of their benefit, this may stop if you claim carer's allowance.

Seek advice if you are getting one of these benefits and are not sure if you will be better off by claiming carer's allowance.

If you claim carer's allowance and have little, or no, other money coming in you may be able to claim means-tested benefits as well.

- If you are under the women's pension age you may be able to claim **income support** to top up your carer's allowance. You can also claim income support while the person you look after is waiting for their DLA, PIP or attendance allowance claim to be decided or for up to 34 weeks, whichever is sooner.
- If you are over the women's pension age you can claim **pension credit**.
- You may be able to claim **housing benefit** and/or **council tax support** to help pay for your rent and council tax.

Carer's allowance is treated as income for these means-tested benefits but you will usually be better off by up to £34.60 per week as you will get an extra amount for caring added

into the calculation. If you cannot get carer's allowance because you get another overlapping benefit instead, it may still be worth claiming because you may get *extra* means-tested benefit due to the carer premium/addition.

Example: George looks after his wife Antonia, who gets AA. He has a state pension of £115.95 per week and she gets £69.50. This is topped up by pension credit of £45.40. George applies for carer's allowance. He won't get it, because his pension is higher than the carer's allowance but he receives a letter from the Carer's Allowance Unit confirming that he has 'underlying entitlement' to carer's allowance. George asks the Pension Service to reassess his pension credit, resulting in an extra £34.60 per week because of the carer addition, bringing the pension credit up to £80.00.

Warning!

If you claim carer's allowance, this may affect the benefits paid to the person you look after. If they have a severe disability premium included in their income support, pension credit, income-based jobseeker's allowance, income-related employment and support allowance, housing benefit or council tax support, their severe disability premium will stop if you are paid carer's allowance. However if you cannot be paid carer's allowance because of the overlapping benefit rule, the person you care for won't lose their severe disability premium. Get advice before claiming in these circumstances and see the section below if you are getting universal credit which has different rules.

For more information about the range of benefits available for carers see our **extra money for carers** information on www.hertsdirect.org/benefits

How will carers be affected by universal credit?

Universal credit is a new benefit which is replacing income support, income-based job seeker's allowance, income-related employment and support allowance, housing benefit, working tax credit and child tax credit for people of **working age**.

It is currently only available in Hertfordshire for new claims from certain single, childless claimants who would previously have claimed income-based jobseeker's allowance.

However DWP planning is for universal credit to become available for new claims from all claimant groups, including carers, by mid-2018, although this process is unlikely to start locally until 2017 at the earliest. Once this happens carers will have to claim universal credit to top up carer's allowance rather than income support, housing benefit or tax credits.

Carers who receive any of the means-tested benefits that universal credit replaces will be moved on to the new benefit at some point between 2018-21.

There are some important differences for carers in universal credit compared to current means-tested benefits:

- carers who look after a severely disabled person for at least 35 hours a week will be able to get an extra amount for caring in their universal credit without having to claim carer's allowance; however, if you get the carer element in your universal

credit, the person you look after won't be able to get a severe disability premium in any means-tested benefit they claim.

- working carers will be able to retain the extra 'carer' element even if earning more than the earnings limit for carer's allowance.
- carers who are also ill and disabled will only be able to get an extra amount for limited capability for work or caring, not both.

How will carers be affected by personal independence payment?

Personal independence payment (PIP) is replacing DLA for people aged 16 and over. If the person you are looking after already gets DLA, they will be invited to apply for PIP at some point by the end of September 2017.

If they apply for PIP they will be able to carry on getting DLA until their PIP claim is decided. If they are awarded either rate of PIP daily living component, then you will be able to carry on getting carer's allowance.

How will carers be affected by the benefit cap?

Total benefit payments to working age households are subject to a **benefit cap**. Currently carer's allowance is included as one of the benefits in the capped amount. However, some households are excluded from the cap, for example, if you, your partner or dependent child is getting attendance allowance, DLA or PIP the cap will not apply to you.

From autumn 2016 you will also be exempt if you are getting carer's allowance, the carer element in universal credit or guardian's allowance. For more information about universal credit, PIP and the benefit cap see www.hertsdirect.org/benefits

What can I do if I am unhappy with a benefit decision?

If you are unhappy with any decision about carer's allowance or other DWP benefits you can ask the DWP to look at their decision again. This is called a mandatory reconsideration. You have one month from the date of the decision letter to do this although this time limit can be extended in special circumstance.

If you are still not happy after having a mandatory reconsideration, you can appeal to an independent tribunal.

See our factsheet on **challenging decisions** on www.hertsdirect.org/benefits and seek advice if necessary.

Further help and advice

Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB)

Online information:

Information about local CABx and opening times:

0344 4111 444

www.adviceguide.org.uk

www.hertfordshirecab.org.uk

Carers in Hertfordshire

Tel: 01992 586969

The Red House, 119 Fore Street,
Hertford, SG14 1AX

www.carersinherts.org.uk

Carers Direct

Tel: 0300 123 1053

www.nhs.uk/carersdirect

Carer's Allowance Unit (DWP)

Tel: 0345 608 4321

Textphone: 0345 604 5312

Carers Allowance Unit

Mail Handling Site A

Wolverhampton

WV98 2AB

GOV.UK

Government information on benefits and services

www.gov.uk

How you can contact Hertfordshire County Council

Our website

Visit our website for more information about support for carers and adult social care - make a referral for care services or apply online for meals on wheels or a Blue Badge

www.hertsdirect.org/adults

If you would like more information about benefits and debt you can find a wide range of Money Advice Unit factsheets

www.hertsdirect.org/benefits

Hertfordshire Directory

Find national and local community groups, charities, services and activities

www.hertsdirect.org/directory

HertsHelp

Independent information and advice on local community services and care funding

Telephone: 0300 123 4044

Minicom: 0300 456 2364

Email: info@hertshelp.net

Call us

For information and advice on how to get care and support

Telephone: 0300 123 4042 Text Message: 07797 870591

Textphone: 0300 123 4041

Calls to 0300 cost no more than a national rate call to a 01 or 02 number

If you are worried that you or someone you know is at risk of abuse or neglect

Call us on 0300 123 4042 (24 hours a day)

If you need help to understand

Call 0300 123 4042 if you would like help to understand this information or need it in a different format. You can also ask to speak to someone in your own language.

This information is correct at time of print. It is for guidance only and is not an authoritative statement of the law.