

Senate Community Affairs Committee
ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
FAMILIES, HOUSING, COMMUNITY SERVICES AND
INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO
2011-12 Supplementary Estimates Hearings

Outcome Number: 5

Question No: 295

Topic: Carer Eligibility

Hansard Page: Written

Senator Boyce asked:

Under certain exceptional circumstances some full time carers genuinely remain in their role as carers after the person they are caring for, has been moved into a residential care facility. These are people whose presence is vital for the daily ongoing care and wellbeing of the person in care.

Due to their continued role as carers, they are unable to work but currently the department deems that they no longer qualify as carers and reclassifies them as unemployed. They have to register with Newstart if they wish to continue to receive any financial support. They no longer have access to respite services, carer support services and the full financial support afforded to carers. These are people who need and deserve the full support of the carer system and yet not only does the department fail to provide that support, the department actually adds to the stress in their lives by requiring that they regularly report to the Newstart office and justify why they are not working.

a. Why do these people no longer qualify for recognition as carers?

b. Is there any provision for exceptional circumstances when assessing whether a person qualifies as a carer?

c. At the point in time when a person is moved into a residential care facility and the carer's status comes under review, is it possible to introduce a mechanism specifically to recognise those people who genuinely continue in their caring role, and let them remain within the carer system?

d. Will the department consider introducing this safety net, and how soon?

e. To catch those people who have slipped through the cracks, is it possible to introduce a mechanism in the Newstart system that would trigger when a person is granted exemption from work due to their on-going role as a carer (for exceptional circumstances described above) –and thereby recognise that this person should be reinstated into the carer system?

Answer:

The following information is provided about income support payments.

Question A. - Why do these people no longer qualify for recognition as carers?

The Social Security Act specifies that to be eligible for Carer Payment a person must personally provide 'constant care' for an adult or child on a daily basis for a 'significant period' during each day in the home of the person(s) being cared for.

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Question B - Is there any provision for exceptional circumstances when assessing whether a person qualifies as a carer?

Yes. Where an adult is diagnosed in the final phase of a terminal illness and is not expected to live more than 3 months or a child has a terminal condition and the average life expectancy with the same or a similar condition is not substantially longer than 24 months exceptional circumstances apply in assessing Carer Payment claims.

Question C - At the point in time when a person is moved into a residential care facility and the carer's status comes under review, is it possible to introduce a mechanism specifically to recognise those people who genuinely continue in their caring role, and let them remain within the carer system

If a carer notifies Centrelink of their change in circumstances they will continue to receive Carer Payment for 14 weeks from the date of permanent admission of the care receiver to a residential care facility. At the time of notification, Centrelink will discuss with the carer whether they wish to apply for any other income support payments.

Question D - Will the department consider introducing this safety net, and how soon?

See answer to question C above.

Question E - To catch those people who have slipped through the cracks, is it possible to introduce a mechanism in the Newstart system that would trigger when a person is granted exemption from work due to their on-going role as a carer (for exceptional circumstances described above) – and thereby recognise that this person should be reinstated into the carer system?

A carer on Newstart Allowance may be granted an activity test exemption due to their caring responsibilities. The process for getting any exemption regarding Newstart Allowance is a matter for the Department of Employment, Education, and Workplace Relations to address.