



Budget 2017: What it means for carers

Set out below is an overview of the key 2017-18 federal Budget measures that may affect carers.

There may be other relevant measures that are not included in this overview and more detailed information can be found at www.budget.gov.au

Call the Department of Human Services (Centrelink) for information about income support payments:

- **carers** (Carer Payment and Carer Allowance) Mon to Fri 8 am to 5 pm on **132 717**
- **families** (Family Tax Benefit, Child Care Benefit, Parenting Payment, Double Orphan Pension, Baby Bonus) Mon to Fri 8 am to 8 pm on **136 150**
- **people with disability** (Disability Support Pension, Mobility Allowance, Sickness Allowance) Mon to Fri 8 am to 5 pm on **132 717**
- **students and trainees** (Austudy, Low Income Health Care Card, Pensioner Education Supplement, Youth Allowance) Mon to Fri 8 am to 5 pm on **132 490**, or for ABSTUDY Mon to Fri 8 am to 5 pm on **1800 132 317**

Please note that Budget measures must be passed by Parliament before they can come into effect

Summary

The Budget did not include any new measures that will directly affect carer support services or social welfare payments devoted to carers. .

Several measures were announced that relate to the interests of carers, including additional supports for the people to whom they provide care.

Simplification of income support payments

What has changed?

From 2020, there will be a new JobSeeker Payment, consolidating NewStart Allowance and Sickness Allowance and older recipients will have increased job search and/or work/study requirements. Payments that have been closed to new entrants for some time, including Widow Allowance, Partner Allowance, Widow B Pension and Wife Pension will be closed altogether, with most recipients transferring to Aged Pension. Bereavement Allowance will be incorporated into the JobSeeker payment. Eligibility for the Pensioner Concession Card and the Health Care Card will not be affected.

Who does this affect?

This measure does not apply to people on the Carer Payment, Age Pension or Disability Support Pension (DSP).

Residency requirements for pensioners

What has changed?

From 1 July 2018, people who claim Age Pension or DSP will have to meet residency requirements:

- 15 years or more of continuous Australian residence
- 10 years of continuous residence, with 5 years during their working life, or
- 10 years of continuous residence, without receiving an activity tested income support payment (for example NewStart Allowance or Youth Allowance) for a cumulative period of 5 years.

Who does this affect?

Older people and people with disability (and their carers) who have not been residents in Australia for what the Government considers to be a sufficient time.

One off energy security payment

What has changed?

A **one off** energy security payment will be made to people who receive Age Pension, Disability Support Pension (DSP) and Parenting Payment (Single) (PPS). The payment of \$75 for singles and \$125 for couples recognises the impact of recent increases in energy costs on low income households.

Who does this affect?

The payment will be made to Aged Pension, DSP, PPS recipients and some Department of Veterans Affairs payments, but will not be extended to Carer Payment or Carer Allowance. For carers receiving the fortnightly or quarterly Energy Supplement attached to their Carer Payment, this will continue.

Pensioner Education Supplement

What has changed?

The measure to cease the Pensioner Education Supplement (PES), announced in the 2014 Budget and strongly opposed by Carers Australia, has been withdrawn. Instead, PES payments will be made based on study loads that align with the Education Entry Payment.

Who does this affect?

People receiving certain types of income support payments, including Carer Payment and DSP, will continue to receive the Pensioner Education Supplement if they are studying. There may be some changes to the amount the person receives, based on their study load.

Reinstate Pensioner Concession Card

What has changed?

The Pensioner Concession Card will be reinstated for people who were no longer entitled to the pension following changes to the pension assets test from 1 January 2017.

Who does this affect?

Reinstating the Pensioner Concession Card will enable pensioners to access Commonwealth subsidised hearing services, among the other benefits the card offers.

Reduce Centrelink call wait times and improve processes

What has changed?

The Government will increase funding to the Department of Human Services to reduce call waiting times and improve processing times.

Who does this affect?

Intended to improve services, including call wait times and processing claims and other documentation, for Centrelink customers.

Increased funding for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) funded by higher Medicare levy

What has changed?

The Medicare levy will increase from 2 per cent to 2.5 per cent with increased revenue to be quarantined to directly fund the NDIS and to guarantee Medicare.

Who does this affect?

All taxpayers with incomes above the low income tax free threshold.

Establish the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission

What has changed

A new independent regulatory body, the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, will be established on 1 January 2018.

Who does this affect?

The new Commission will replace quality and safeguarding arrangements put in place by the state and territory governments, to provide nationally consistent regulation to set expectations for providers and the disability workforce to deliver quality and safe services.

Indexation of Medicare rebates

What has changed?

Indexation of Medicare rebates will be restored, starting with GP bulk billing in July 2017, and continuing with standard GP and specialist consultations in July 2018, through to specialist procedures and allied health from July 2019.

Who does this affect?

Medical practitioners, their patients and their carers.

Health Care Homes

What has changed?

A trial of Health Care Homes will fund up to 20 general practices and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services to from 1 October 2017, and a further 180 services from 1 December 2017, to coordinate primary health care.

Who does this affect?

People with multiple and complex health needs, who may benefit from support by a health care team coordinated by their GP or health service.

Community pharmacies home visits

What has changed?

Funding for community pharmacies, including home visits to manage medication.

Who does this affect?

Home Medicines Reviews are highly valued by many carers, especially those administering multiple prescription and non-prescription medication (which may have accumulated over considerable time) and who, due to their caring responsibilities, are often substantially housebound.

Eligible patients should continue to receive medication management home visits if this service is provided by their pharmacies. However, as far as is known, there is still a cap on the number of home visits pharmacies that will be subsidised.

For a patient to be eligible, they must:

- be a current Medicare/Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) cardholder
- live in a community setting, and
- be at risk of experiencing medication misadventure.

The patient's GP must confirm that there is an identifiable clinical need and that the patient will benefit from a HMR service.

In-patients of public and private hospitals, day hospital facilities or permanent residents of a Government Funded Facility are ineligible for a HMR service.

Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) and Regional Assessment Services (RAS)

What has changed?

Funding will be extended to continue to assess the needs and provide aged care supports for people with moderate support needs living at home. These supports include such things as meals, assistance with personal care, nursing care, domestic assistance, home maintenance, social activities in a community-based group setting, transport assistance, respite, and allied health services (foot care, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, advice from dietitians, speech pathology).

Who does this affect?

People over the age of 65 years (or 50 years for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders) and their carers who need some assistance to continue living at home. People who have higher, more complex needs for assistance can access Home Care Packages.

Greater choice for at home palliative care

What has changed?

The Government will fund at home palliative (end of life) care services for three years from 1 July 2017.

Who does this affect?

People with terminal illnesses who would prefer to stay at home rather than transition into hospital or hospice care at the end of their lives.

Psychosocial support services

What has changed?

There will be funding for psychosocial support services for people with mental illness who do not qualify for the NDIS, subject to matched funding from the states and territories.

Who does this affect?

There has been considerable concern about a growing gap in the services available in the community to assist people with a mental health condition which is not considered to be sufficiently debilitating, or an impairment that is permanent or likely to be permanent, to entitle them to support under the NDIS. It is hoped this funding will address the gaps in services for these people.

Suicide prevention programs

What has changed?

The states and territories will be funded to prevent suicide in high risk locations and Lifeline will receive additional funding.

Who does this affect?

People at risk of suicide and their carers and families.

Research into mental health

What has changed?

The Government will fund the National Centre for Excellence in Youth Mental Health (Orygen) for research infrastructure, and the Black Dog and Thompson Institutes, to research mental health, including contributing to further work on suicide prevention and early intervention.

Who does this affect?

In the longer term, this research is intended to improve services for people with mental health conditions.

Support for defence force veterans with mental health conditions

What has changed?

There will be a package of measures to support veterans comprising:

- mental health services for current and ex-service personnel without proof that their condition is linked to service
- a pilot program of case management for veterans discharged from hospital.

The Department of Veterans Affairs will also work with the Department of Human Services to address problems with income support claims system.

Who does this affect?

Current and former defence force personnel, including those who may not previously been entitled to services because their condition could not be linked to their defence force employment.

My Aged Care operations

What has changed?

Improved operations of My Aged Care, the online platform that provides advice, assistance and access to aged care services.

Who does this affect?

People who are seeking aged care services and to providers of aged care.

Aged care workforce strategy

What has changed?

Workforce shortages in both aged and disability care are a major concern for government, service providers and those who need these services. An aged care industry-led taskforce will develop an aged care workforce strategy to connect with, and complement, the NDIS Integrated Market, Sector and Workforce Strategy.

Who does this affect?

Older people who may benefit from improved productivity in the aged care workforce, including in regional and remote areas.