

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SECURITY
BY DEPUTY G.P. SOUTHERN OF ST. HELIER
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 20th MARCH 2012**

Question

Will the Minister state what numbers of claims and total sums for Income Support special payments were paid to claimants in 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011 by group, as follows:

1. Essential household equipment
2. Rental deposit
3. Removal expenses
4. Employment related expenses
5. Medical expenses
 - a) Additional GP visits
 - b) Dentistry
 - c) Chiropody
 - d) Optician's services
 - e) Medical products (e.g. dressings)
6. Health & Safety
7. Funerals
8. Failed jobseekers

How many claims paid for dentistry would have been reduced or stopped by the new cap of £500 over 2 years, along with the total savings?

Does the Minister agree that early intervention in this area, is a "spend to save" measure that will prevent greater costs in the long term in line with the approach presented in the Health and Social Services green paper "Caring for each other"?

What consultation has the Minister undertaken with dentists or the Minister for Health and Social Services to assess the impact on dental health of income support claimants and in potential increased costs in the long term of the denial of essential and preventative dental surgery resulting from the new limits and, if none, when will he do so?

Answer

The table below provides information on Income Support Special Payments, analysed according to the categories set out in the special payment regulations.

	Special Payment	2011		2010		2009	
Regulation	Description	No	Amount	No	Amount	No	Amount
1(a)	Essential household equipment	531	£181,417	506	£154,116	472	£145,515
1(b)	Rental deposit	202	£186,654	149	£107,632	171	£138,200
1(c)	Removal expenses	49	£7,989	71	£12,331	48	£7,149
1(d)	Employment related expenses	14	£488	2	£371	-	-
1(e)	Medical expenses	1,609	£989,631	2,006	£907,599	2,127	£754,549
2	Health & safety	1	£98	3	£2,512	3	£664
3	Funerals	34	£52,998	28	£37,142	12	£14,985

Note that the table does not include data for 2008, which was recorded in a different format. The data for 2011 is based on unaudited accounts. Audited figures will be available later this year. Where appropriate, costs have been allocated proportionately to reflect the year in which the expense arose. In some cases, claim numbers refer to multiple claims for the same household, reflecting different administrative procedures during the years in question.

Under the Income Support law, a household is not entitled to receive benefit if any adult jobseeker within the household fails to actively seek work. In this situation, the special payment regulations provide residual support for the household. It is not possible to separate these costs from other household income support benefit costs.

No claims for urgent dental treatment will be reduced or stopped because of the new rules for dental special payments, as the department will offer an interest free loan if the cost of the urgent treatment exceeds the £500 limit for grants.

In 2011 there were 232 claims that exceeded £500. 50 of these were for over 65s or people in receipt of levels 2 or 3 of the Personal Care component of Income Support and so would be unaffected by the £500 limit on grant payments. 182 claims would have been capped at a grant of £500 from the Department, with any balance above this provided in the form of an interest-free loan. As noted in the report accompanying MD-S-2012-0015, based on the figures for dental special payments in 2011, interest free loans would have replaced grants in respect of approximately £87,000 of claims.

Income Support Special Payments were not designed as a scheme to provide preventative healthcare; they were created in law to assist low income families with unexpected one-off costs, and the claimant needs to show that s/he is “in urgent need of the goods or services being provided¹”, to qualify for the payment.

1 Income Support (Special Payments) (Jersey) Regulations 2007 Reg 3(1)

The role of early intervention in dental care is a matter for the Minister for Health and Social Services. However, our two departments already work closely together, and preventative dental care is promoted through our funding of the Jersey Dental Fitness Scheme, which is targeted at children from low-income families who are aged between 11 and 21 and still in full-time education. Below that age, HSSD provide a school dental service.

As noted in my Ministerial statement of 6 December 2011, I am already committed to a review of the Jersey Dental Fitness Scheme over the next twelve months as part of a broader review into the way the existing funding for dental services is targeted.

“The (SR.12/2010 Scrutiny) Review noted that support with dental costs was available to teenagers through the Dental Fitness Scheme and to pensioners through the 65+ Health Scheme. However, neither of these schemes have been reviewed for a number of years. I will undertake to review the provision of assistance with dental costs under both these schemes during 2012. The reviews will also consider the administration of the two schemes.”

Local dentists already consult with the Department both informally and through their participation on the board of the Jersey Dental Fitness Scheme. My officers will be consulting extensively with dentists during the review of dental services, as well as officers at the Health and Social Services Department.

It must be emphasised that there has not been, and will not be, any denial of essential, urgent dental surgery to Income Support customers who cannot afford to pay.
