

SASSA Media Statement on Disability Grants

To: All Media

08 July 2020

SASSA Strategy for Restoring Lapsing Disability Grants

Disability grants that were supposed to lapse from March 2020 have been extended to the end of October in order to cushion affected beneficiaries against the pressures brought about by the State of National Disaster and the subsequent lockdown. Ministerial Directions issued on 30 March 2020 enable continued payment of temporary disability grants throughout the lockdown period. Directions were issued in order to reinstate all temporary disability grants which lapsed in the period between February and June 2020. These grants will remain in payment until October 2020.

In preparation for re-instating the application process for disability grants SASSA developed the strategy below to phase in these services.

Disability grant applications require assessment by a medical doctor. The COVID-19 epidemic led to a situation where services from the Health Department such as these assessments were suspended in order to redirect resources at combatting the COVID-19 epidemic. Temporary disability grants have a lifespan of twelve months and beneficiaries have to re-apply after the prescribed period. In twelve months there is a possibility that a

medical condition might have improved to the extent that it does not require continuation of temporary disability grant.

The SASSA strategy to reintroduce disability related services as from July 2020 required all regions to engage the Provincial Departments of Health to determine what support can be provided. The reintroduction of disability services is impacted by the limited access to health facilities and this is why the strategy developed provides for a phased in approach.

The different categories of disability grant applications will be prioritised as follows:

Priority 1: All clients whose medical assessments were done before lockdown, but having incomplete applications. Medical assessments for disability grants are valid for a period of 3 months only and the first priority will be to complete the applications before the medicals expire. Medicals for care dependency grants do not expire, so any which were done prior to lockdown will result in an application.

Priority 2: All applications which were booked for assessment but assessments could not be done prior to lockdown. The numbers of cases affected in priorities 1 and 2 are 19 035 in the country.

Priority 3: Permanent disability grant beneficiaries who were last paid in January 2020, because they did not complete the review process as legislatively required. There are a total of 1 844 of these clients nationally. The majority of these clients were in fact booked for assessments prior to lockdown, and therefore are catered for under category 2.

The above three priorities will be dealt with on an appointment basis only and the local offices will contact the clients to make these appointments, as the details are known.

Priority 4: Urgent cases which are referred by Departments of Health with medical assessments already having been done in the health facility. This could be, for example, clients who were hospitalised and discharged but are not able to be employed at all due to their disability. Other urgent cases may be referred from hospices or other avenues. The difference is that the assessment must have been done by a state medical officer already and not require a booking for an assessment.

Priority 5: New applicants who need to be booked for assessments. SASSA has a total of 475 contracted medical officers who can conduct assessments. In order to

comply with the COVID-19 protocols, the number of assessments per session have been reduced from 40 to 20. This will enable sanitisation of the facility and equipment between clients seen.

Many assessments were done in health facilities prior to COVID-19, SASSA has had to identify spaces within SASSA offices where assessments can be undertaken as an alternative. PPEs are provided to the medical officers (gloves, masks and sanitisers) while all staff and clients have to have face masks and sanitizers are available at every office.

Local offices will set aside two days per week to attend to disability related matters. This is possible as the numbers, particularly of older persons requiring assessments, seems to have declined slightly from the numbers that were seen when the offices were first re-opened.

SASSA is acutely aware of the challenges persons with disabilities have faced as a result of the non-availability of assessment services and is doing everything possible to be able to attend to the many cases that require attention.

It should also be borne in mind that, in order to limit the negative impact of the lockdown on persons with disabilities. In addition, care dependency grants which lapsed because the care dependent child turned 18 years of age (at which point they would usually be expected to apply for a disability grant in his/her own right) in the period from February to October 2020 will remain in payment until October 2020.

Issued on behalf of SASSA

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