

## **SASSA Media Release**

**12 April 2021**

### **Western Cape's unusually high temporary disability grant numbers raise red flags.**

At the end of December 2020, SASSA lapsed approximately 210 000 temporary disability grants, as the period for which they had been approved had expired. These grants had been extended during the 2020 financial year, to limit hardship to those clients who were unable to re-apply for the grant during the lockdown. However, in accordance with the Social Assistance Act, 2004, the grants were then lapsed at the end of December.

The Western Cape is the most affected province with the highest numbers which actually surpass those of the biggest provinces by grant uptake, ie. KZN and Gauteng. Due to this development, the Western Cape is in the process of partnering with the University of Cape Town to conduct research into the seemingly abnormally high number of temporary disability grants in that province. Of the total of 197 452 which were lapsed, almost a quarter were found in the Western Cape. It is expected that this research, when concluded will really assist in understanding the disability environment in the Western Cape better.

Approximately 16 000 grants paid through procurators or administrators or paid together with a grant in aid were identified, where the client was to turn 60 in 2021. These grants were reinstated and will be paid either until the beneficiary turns 60, in which case they will convert automatically to a grant for older persons, or until 31 March 2022, when the beneficiaries will have to re-apply.

This left a balance of 197 452 which were lapsed. SASSA committed publicly to complete the assessment process for the re-applications of these grants by 31 March 2021.

As at this date, a total of 167 856 clients who indicated that they wanted to re-apply had been booked for medical assessments, and 129 851 assessments have been completed. Of the remaining 27 945 nationally who have not contacted SASSA to indicate their intention to re-apply for the grant, SASSA conducted a random sample of 10% of these clients, to find out why they had not returned to apply for the grant. Contact was made with 2 782 clients in this sampling.

The responses received from the clients varied. Some could not be reached at all through the contact details they had provided to SASSA on the initial application. Those who were contacted indicated that they did not intend to re-apply, as their condition had improved to the extent that they felt they did not qualify for the grant; or that they had managed to find employment and no longer required the grant. There were also some who had been admitted to a state funded institution and were therefore already being supported by the state.

The only province where there are still clients who need to be assessed is Western Cape and plans are in place to complete these in the month of April.

Lessons learnt during the implementation of this project will improve the way SASSA works with all disability related grants in the future. Innovations which will improve the client experience include the development of an on-line booking system for assessments, where clients can control their own bookings, without having to come to the SASSA office to have this done for them. Access to the referral forms for the medical history are on the SASSA website, so that clients can download these and have them completed in preparation for the assessment by the SASSA contracted doctor – again preventing a trip to the SASSA office. This hybrid model makes provision for the traditional face to face physical assessment; but also a virtual assessment, working off the clinical file which is already

in the health environment. This is supplemented by a telephonic interview, where the information is inadequate.

The monthly lapsing of temporary disability grants will continue into the future because legally the disability grants are awarded as a temporary grant, and the grant will be in payment for a period of 6 – 12 months. The ability to improve service delivery and reduce the numbers of times any one client has to return to a SASSA office in order to re-apply for the grant is thus ongoing. “This situation is under control and the innovations introduced will enhance customer experience”; SASSA CEO Totsie Memela concluded.

Issued on behalf of SASSA