

NHS charge notices for prescriptions for claimants on Universal Credit

Q. What are the eligibility criteria for claimants on Universal Credit to receive help with their health costs?

A. Help with health costs is a term used to describe a range of exemptions and remissions from NHS charges. Some DWP benefits automatically “passport” an individual to help with their health costs meaning that they are entitled to: free NHS prescriptions; free NHS dental treatment; free NHS wigs and fabric supports; free sight tests and glasses or contact lenses (via optical vouchers); and free travel for NHS treatment (for any additional journey to receive NHS care) following a referral by a doctor, dentist or optician (but not for primary care).

Claimants will qualify if, on the date they claim help with health costs:

a) they receive Universal Credit, and either had no earnings or had net earnings of £435 or less in their last Universal Credit assessment period;

or

b) receive Universal Credit, which includes an element for a child, or they (or their partner) had limited capability for work and work-related activity, and either had no earnings or net earnings of £935 or less in their last Universal Credit assessment period.

For couples, the net earning threshold applies to the combined net earnings.

Q. There is no box on the prescription form for claimants to tick that they are on UC. What should they do?

A. The prescription form has not yet been amended to include a tick box for a patient to declare that they are entitled to free prescriptions because they are on Universal Credit (and their earnings were below the relevant threshold). Until the prescription form can be amended claimants should tick the “gets income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance” box on the back of the prescription form. This approach has been agreed with NHS and DH, and the advice is shown on the relevant NHS web page. Guidance has also been shared with pharmacies.

Q. Will claimants need to provide pharmacies with proof of their entitlement?

A. Pharmacists may well ask to see evidence that claimants are receiving Universal Credit. Claimants can produce their current entitlement letter, or claimants receiving UC in full service areas can show their electronic entitlement (i.e. on their smart phone). We will be working with both DH and NHS to ensure they review the current guidance to pharmacists, and help to improve understanding of the changes under UC.

Q. A claimant has just told me that they have received a notice stating that they must pay a penalty even though they are clearly claiming UC and have ticked the JSA (IB) box.

A. If a claimant has received the penalty notice, and feels it has been incorrectly issued, then they must make an appeal against the penalty. Full details of how to do this and any supporting evidence the claimant will need is given in full with the penalty notice. The NHS Business Services Authority is not carrying out prescription charge exemption checks on prescription forms where the JSA box has been ticked. So in these cases, no penalty charge notices will be issued. However,

there may be penalty charge notices where claimants have ticked the wrong box or have ticked no box at all. We will continue to monitor the situation to investigate any new penalties issued.

Q. Some claimants are not sure if they are eligible for free prescriptions. What should they do?

A. Claimants should pay for any health costs if they are unsure whether they meet the eligibility criteria. They can claim a refund once they are able to confirm entitlement. This might be the case because:

- the Universal Credit claim is still being assessed;
- they are awaiting a decision about Universal Credit claim that might change the threshold;
- claimants are uncertain whether earnings are within the threshold.

Claimants need to have met the eligibility criteria either in the Universal Credit period before or in the same assessment period to qualify for a refund.

Claimants must ask for and keep receipts. A receipt and refund form (FP57) must be obtained at the time of payment, as they will not be able to get one later. Full details on how to claim a refund are included in the NHS web link below.

Q. A claimant has told me they have already paid the fine but believes they were receiving UC. What should they do?

A. The NHS Business Services Authority will look at these cases on an individual basis and will investigate if the penalty charge was appropriate. Contact details are included in any correspondence the claimant has, or by contacting NHS Low Income Scheme helpline – 0300 330 1343.

Q. Where can claimants get further information on help with their health costs?

A. Claimants can visit the NHS website for information on Health Costs and Universal Credit <https://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcosts/Pages/nhs-low-income-scheme.aspx>

Or call on one of the helpline for further information - 0300 330 1343.