

Fact Sheet – Cessation of Wife Pension

What is happening with Wife Pension?

- Wife Pension ceased on 20 March 2020, and recipients were transferred to a new payment depending on their individual circumstances.

Changes on 20 March 2020

- Wife Pension recipients were transferred to another payment or had their payment cancelled on 20 March 2020.
 - Approximately 950 recipients who were over Age Pension age were automatically transferred to Age Pension at the same rate of payment;
 - Approximately 2,780 recipients who were receiving Carer Allowance were automatically transferred to Carer Payment at the same rate of payment;
 - Approximately 3,850 recipients who were living in Australia and under Age Pension qualification age and not receiving Carer Allowance were automatically transferred to the new JobSeeker Payment.
 - Wife Pension recipients who were transferred to JobSeeker Payment on 20 March 2020 receive a transition rate of payment based on the maximum Wife Pension rate as at 19 March 2020. This rate will not be indexed until the JobSeeker Payment rate is equal to or more than the transition rate.
 - These recipients are required to meet mutual obligation requirements and will be referred to an employment services provider, unless they are otherwise exempt.
- Services Australia (Centrelink) will contact recipients between April and June 2020 and make appointments to help people understand their mutual obligations and any other requirements, including answering any questions they may have.
 - Wife Pensioners who have transferred to JobSeeker Payment will not have mutual obligations until after they have an appointment with Centrelink.
- Around 170 Wife Pension recipients under Age Pension qualification age who were living overseas on 20 March 2020 may no longer be eligible for an Australian Government payment.
 - Where a cancelled recipient lives in a country with an international social security agreement with Australia, they may be able to claim other payments under the agreement, subject to meeting eligibility requirements.
- The Age Pension or Disability Support Pension (DSP) paid to partners of Wife Pension recipients were not affected by these changes.
- A letter was sent out to most Wife Pension recipients in the week of 16 September 2019, informing them of the upcoming changes to their payment.

- A separate letter was sent out in the week of 14 October 2019 to Wife Pension recipients who were under Age Pension age and living overseas.
- Reminder letters were sent out in January 2020 to Wife Pension recipients who were transferring to JobSeeker Payment and recipients who were being cancelled off payment.

Payment Background

- Wife Pension was a non-activity tested income support payment paid to female partners of Age Pension or DSP recipients.
- Wife Pension has been closed to new entrants since 1 July 1995.
- Wife Pension was paid at the Age Pension rate. Wife Pension recipients living in Australia also received Pension Supplement and Energy Supplement.
- As at September 2019, there were nearly 8,000 people receiving Wife Pension. Of these, around half received Wife Pension Age while the other half received Wife Pension DSP.

Cameos:

1. Sally

- Sally was born on 6 June 1953 and lives in Australia.
- Sally has been receiving Wife Pension since 14 August 1993.
- Sally continues to receive Wife Pension until the payment ceases on 20 March 2020.
- As Sally will be over Age Pension age on this date, Sally automatically transfers to Age Pension and receives the same rate of payment that she received on Wife Pension.

2. Mei

- Mei was born on 10 August 1960 and lives in Australia.
- Mei has been receiving Wife Pension since 1 May 1992 and is also receiving Carer Allowance for her husband.
- Mei continues to receive Wife Pension until the payment ceases on 20 March 2020.
- As Mei is receiving Carer Allowance on this date, she automatically transfers to Carer Payment and receives the same rate of payment that received on Wife Pension.

3. Dolly

- Dolly was born on 1 January 1960 and lives in Australia.
- Dolly has been receiving Wife Pension since 1 January 1995.
- Dolly continues to receive Wife Pension until the payment ceases on 20 March 2020.
- As Dolly is under Age Pension age on this date, she automatically transfers to JobSeeker Payment.
- Dolly receives the Wife Pension transition rate of JobSeeker Payment, which is based on the maximum Wife Pension rate as at 19 March 2020.
- Dolly's payment rate will not be indexed until the rate of JobSeeker Payment equals or exceeds her Wife Pension transition rate.
- After 20 March 2020, Services Australia (Centrelink) will contact Dolly to make arrangements for an appointment between April and June 2020 to support her with her transition arrangements.
- Dolly will not have mutual obligation requirements until after she attends the appointment.
- At the appointment, Centrelink will first determine if Dolly is eligible for an exemption to her mutual obligation requirements.
- If Dolly is not eligible for an exemption, Centrelink will:
 - run the Job Seeker Classification Instrument to better understand Dolly's circumstances and determine the best type of employment services provider, and/or;
 - refer Dolly to an Employment Services Assessment so her circumstances can be further assessed; and/or
 - refer Dolly to an appropriate employment services provider - either jobactive, Disability Employment Services or Community Development Programme.

- Dolly will need to meet with her employment services provider to negotiate a Job Plan and agree her ongoing mutual obligation requirements.

4. Svetlana

- Svetlana was born on 3 April 1951 and lives permanently in Russia.
- Svetlana has been receiving Wife Pension since 1 July 1990.
- Svetlana continues to receive Wife Pension until the payment ceases on 20 March 2020.
- As Svetlana is over Age Pension age, she is automatically transferred to Age Pension and receives the same rate of payment that she received on Wife Pension.

5. Kiri

- Kiri was born on 10 June 1958 and lives permanently in New Zealand.
- Kiri has been receiving Wife Pension since 1 May 1995.
- Kiri continues to receive Wife Pension until the payment ceases on 20 March 2020.
- As Kiri is under Age Pension age and not living in Australia, she is not eligible to transfer automatically to another payment on this date.
- New Zealand has a social security agreement with Australia that covers Carer Payment and Disability Support Pension. Kiri can lodge a claim for one of these payments.
 - Kiri's eligibility for Disability Support Pension or Carer Payment will be assessed in the same way as Australian residents who make a claim.

6. Elizabeth

- Elizabeth was born on 7 July 1962 and lives permanently in the United Kingdom.
- Elizabeth has been receiving Wife Pension since 1 March 1995.
- Elizabeth continues to receive Wife Pension until the payment ceases on 20 March 2020.
- As Elizabeth is under Age Pension age and not living in Australia, she is not eligible to transfer to another payment on this date.
- The United Kingdom does not currently have a social security agreement with Australia. Elizabeth will not be able to claim any Australian income support payments while she continues living in the United Kingdom. She may however consider claiming a UK government payment, if she is eligible.
- Elizabeth moves to Australia in February 2021, becomes a permanent resident and requires income support. As Elizabeth is still under Age Pension age, has no permanent disability and is not eligible to claim Carer Payment for her husband, she will claim the JobSeeker Payment.
- As Elizabeth is claiming JobSeeker Payment after 20 March 2020 she will not be eligible for the Wife Pension transitional rate of JobSeeker Payment. Instead, she will receive the member of a couple rate of payment.