

[Redacted]

18th October 2018

Dear Customer,

I am writing to update you on recent changes to our Illness Benefit payments process.

The Department introduced a new real-time payment system for Illness Benefit in August of this year which has resulted in changes to customer payment patterns. The old system paid Illness Benefit payments one week in arrears; for many customers this meant that their first payment was only received in week three of their illness or, in some cases, later. Arrears payments would then catch-up as payments continued into the first weeks a person returned to work.

The new system makes payments on a current week basis – so instead of only paying for a past period of illness the system also looks forward and will make a payment each week up to a week forward where certified by a GP. This means that people receive their initial payment earlier and the requirement to make 'catch-up' payments is eliminated.

For most customers this new system has worked well. However for some customers, in particular those who are in receipt of the Illness Benefit payment over an extended period, the introduction of the new payment system has caused some difficulties. If you were one of the customers affected I wish to acknowledge that these changes were not effectively communicated to you and apologise for any difficulties that you may have experienced.

I also wish to assure all people who may have been affected that they will be paid the correct amount for the period of their certified illness.

If you have an urgent financial need arising from these difficulties, you can apply to the Department's Community Welfare Service to receive an interim payment. If you have ongoing queries with regard to your payments, please call 01 704 33 00 or email illnessbenefit@welfare.ie and we will deal with your query as soon as possible.

Further information on the changes is available at <http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Illness-Benefit-Customer-Update.aspx>

Yours sincerely,

John McKeon
Secretary General

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For Written Answer on : 23/10/2018
Question Number(s): 645 Question Reference(s): 43651/18
Department: Employment Affairs and Social Protection
Asked by: Niamh Smyth T.D.

QUESTION

To ask the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath on illness benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

REPLY

Illness Benefit is a scheme administered by my Department which provides for a payment to customers who cannot work due to illness. In order to qualify, you must be aged under 66, covered by the appropriate class of social insurance (PRSI) and satisfy the PRSI conditions.

As at 18th October 2018, the number of Illness Benefit claimants in Cavan, Monaghan, and Meath was as follows:

Cavan - 1,350

Monaghan - 1,097

Meath - 3,415

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

For Written Answer on : 23/10/2018
Question Number(s): 644 Question Reference(s): 43650/18
Department: Employment Affairs and Social Protection
Asked by: Niamh Smyth T.D.

QUESTION

To ask the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the illness benefit payment scheme issues will be resolved in view of the fact that they have been ongoing since August 2018 due to the introduction of a new online system of processing payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

REPLY

My Department recently moved to a new IT system and this has impacted on payments to some Illness Benefit (IB) customers. The transition has involved moving from a payment in arrears system to a real-time system for IB.

The Department acknowledges that this move has caused difficulties for some customers leading to a large volume of calls to its helpline and long delays in responding to customer queries. In order to address this issue, the Department has deployed additional staff to manage customer calls.

I want to assure the Deputy that all IB customers will be paid the correct amount for the period of their illness - as certified by their GP. Any customer who has an urgent financial need can apply to the Department's Community Welfare Service to receive an interim payment. Customers in these circumstances should get in touch with their local Intreo Centre.

My Department is working hard to resolve these payment issues as quickly as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.