Australian Government

Services Australia

Overseas absences for eligible medical reasons 061-01110010

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Background

This document outlines whether a customer may continue to receive payment when they are temporarily overseas due to an eligible medical reason.

Payments portable for eligible medical reasons

Customers receiving the following payments may continue to receive payment while temporarily overseas for eligible medical reasons.

- ABSTUDY
- Austudy (AUS)
- Disability Support Pension (DSP)
- family assistance, Parental Leave payments and Double Orphan Pension (DOP) payable to the holders of visa subclasses 309, 785 granted on or after 16 December 2004, 790 or 820
- Farm Household Allowance (FHA)
- JobSeeker Payment (JSP)
- Special Benefit (SpB)
- Youth Allowance (YA)

Eligible medical treatment criteria

The term eligible medical treatment means recognised medical treatment of a kind that is not available in Australia. It could include specialised or new types of surgery such as transplants or other kinds of treatment. It does not include consultations or travel to be with family outside Australia because the doctor advised if would benefit the patient.

Treatment does not necessarily satisfy the definition of eligible medical treatment just because a doctor approves or recommends it. For example, iridology, herbal treatment, faith healing and similar treatments are not considered eligible medical treatments. See Resources for examples of treatments that do not satisfy the medical treatment criteria.

Centrelink International Services (CIS) staff may need to contact the Health Professional Advisory Unit (HPAU) for further help in determining the consensus of opinion on whether a certain treatment meets the eligible medical treatment criteria.

Note: if a customer enquires about assistance under the Medical Treatment Overseas Program (MTOP), see Discretion to extend portability period.

Verification of eligible medical treatment and payment period

Customers must provide acceptable proof of the absence, preferably prior to departure.

Payment will be subject to general portability rules pending receipt and assessment of evidence. If evidence supports travel was for an approved reason, a specific negotiated period will be determined and back payment issued if required.

Portability Script - Departure and Returns

The Portability Script - Departures and Returns will correctly assess the customer's entitlement to payment while outside Australia. If the script is available, coding the absence from Australia must be done using the script.

Service centre and smart centre staff are responsible for handling the portability interview and any departure coding where a customer clearly does not satisfy an approved reason for travel. The Portability Script will guide service centre staff and smart centre staff when it is necessary to refer to Centrelink International Services (CIS).

Only designated CIS staff have the delegation to approve and record payment overseas for an approved reason.

Portability period

The portability period starts on the day the customer leaves Australia. For portability purposes, a person is not considered to be inside Australia for any part of the day they departed Australia, regardless of the time of departure. If the customer is travelling outside Australia on a cruise, the date of departure is the date the ship leaves the last Australian port.

The day a person returns to Australia is not included as part of the absence as they are considered to be inside Australia on that day (regardless of the time of return) and therefore no longer affected by portability. If they leave and return on the same day, for example, airline crew, this is not considered a departure from Australia for portability purposes.

Payment restoration

If a customer remains outside Australia after their payment has stopped for a portability related reason, continuation of payment on return to Australia may be possible. Generally, the payment may be automatically or manually restored if the return to Australia is within 13 weeks of payment stopping.

If a customer is unable to return to Australia after the maximum portability period, Centrelink International Services (CIS) has discretion to expend the period of portability under limited circumstances.

Notification of intended departure and return

The Department of Home Affairs generally advises when a customer or child leaves or returns to Australia. The Centrelink system uses the information to assesses the portability of payments and concession cards. The assessment will happen regardless of whether the customer has told Services Australia their travel details. **Note: do not** cancel Department of Home Affairs datalink activities.

Where the customer gives evidence they travelled on different dates, the agency should consider using those different dates, if both the following apply:

- the new dates are logical
- the results will be a better outcome for the customer

This most often happens if a customer passes through Australian customs on one day but the flight leaves the next day.

In many cases, customers do not have to tell the agency if they are leaving Australia temporarily for less than 6 weeks, or when they have returned from a temporary absence.

When customers do need to tell us about a departure before leaving Australia or when they have returned to Australia they can use the Travelling outside of Australia service. This service is in their Centrelink online account. If the travel or portability assessment is complex the online service will ask them to contact the agency.

Services Australia website lists when customers must tell the agency they are leaving or returning to Australia. The Resources page has a link.

The Resources page has Services Australia website links about travelling overseas with Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme (PBS) medicine and about payments while outside Australia, the Residence and International intranet page, contacts and examples of unsatisfactory reasons for requesting portability for eligible medical treatment.

Related links

ABSTUDY student or Australian Apprentice customer going overseas

Austudy (AUS) customer going overseas

Coding departures and returns for customers leaving Australia

Disability Support Pension (DSP) customer going overseas

Discretion to extend portability period

Double Orphan Pension (DOP) overseas absences

Family Tax Benefit (FTB), Child Care Subsidy (CCS) and Paid Parental Leave scheme customer/child going overseas

Farm Household Allowance (FHA) customer going overseas

JobSeeker Payment (JSP) customer going overseas

Special Benefit (SpB) customer going overseas

Travelling with or sending medicines overseas

The Health Professional Advisory Unit (HPAU)

Youth Allowance (YA) customer going overseas

References

Policy

Social Security Guide, 7.1.2.10, General rules of portability

Social Security Guide, 7.1.2.20, Application of portability rules (portability table)

Legislation

Links to the Federal Register of Legislation site go to a 'Series' page. Select the 'Latest' version.

Portability of payments

Social Security Act 1991

- section 1212, Meaning of terms used in this Part - meaning of eligible medical treatment
- section 1212C, Meaning of temporary absence
- section 1215, Some payments generally portable with time limit
- section 1217, Meaning of maximum portability period, allowable absence and portability period
- section 1218C, Extension of person's portability period
- section 1218D, Extension of person's portability period-life-saving medical treatment overseas

A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999

- section 24(7), Secretary may extend 6 week period of absence from Australia

Resources

Services Australia website

How to manage your PBS medicine overseas

Payments while outside Australia

Intranet links

Residence and International Section

Contact details

Centrelink International Services (CIS)

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Training & Support

Add the course number to the **Search** field in the Learning Portal (LMS) in ESSentials:

- **CLK00861** - Travelling outside Australia
- **CLK00863** - Portability for job seekers