



# **Government Entitlements for People who are Blind or Vision Impaired**

Here you will find information on what Government benefits and allowances both adults and children who are blind or vision impaired may be entitled to.



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# Entitlements for Adults

## Confirmation of vision impairment

If your best corrected vision is 6 / 60 or below, or your field of vision is less than 20 degrees, you may be entitled to claim certain entitlements from the Government.

Your eye specialist or your local optometrist needs to complete either an NCBI form or provide you with a letter confirming that your level of vision meets the criteria above. This form or letter is then submitted with an application for a Government entitlement. If you would like to use NCBI's form, we can post it to you to bring to your next appointment with your eye specialist or Optometrist or we can post a form directly to them on your behalf. If you are not already seeing an eye specialist, you can ask your GP to refer you.

## 1 Financial Supports from Department of Social Protection



### 1.1 Disability Allowance

Disability Allowance is a weekly means tested payment. You can get Disability Allowance from 16 years of age. If you are in education when you turn 16, you can continue to attend school.

To qualify for Disability Allowance, you must:

- Have a disability that has continued, or may be expected to continue, for at least one year,
- As a result of this disability be substantially restricted in undertaking work that would otherwise be suitable for a person of your age, experience and qualifications and
- Be aged between 16 and 66.

The current maximum personal weekly rate of payment is €220 but this will increase by €12 to €232 from January 2024.



If you are married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting and you both qualify for Disability Allowance, you will each get a weekly personal rate of Disability Allowance.

If you are getting Disability Allowance and go into hospital or residential care, you will continue to get your payment.

You can work and earn up to €165 per week (after deduction of PRSI, any pension contributions and union dues) without your payment being affected.

In November 2023 a €400 Lump Sum Cost of Living Payment will be paid to all Carers and people on long term disability payments.

Find out more information about Disability Allowance and how to apply (link to <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/departments-of-social-protection/>)

## 1.2 Blind Pension

The Blind Pension is means-tested payment. The payment is made up of a maximum personal weekly rate of €220 until January 2024 when it will increase by €12 to €232 for you and extra amounts for a qualified adult and any child dependants you may have.

Blind Pension can be taxed as a source of income.

If you are awarded a Blind Pension, you may also qualify for the Blind Welfare Allowance. If you are under 18 years old, you should make your claim for Blind Pension 4 months before your 18th birthday.

If you are under age 66 and you satisfy the relevant conditions, you may also qualify for other benefits and allowances. If you require full-time care, the person caring for you may qualify for a Carer's Allowance or Carer's Benefit.

You can earn €165 per week from employment before these earnings affect your payment.

Once you turn 66, you are no longer entitled to Blind Pension but instead you may be entitled to other payments for those over 66 years of age.

In November 2023 a €400 Lump Sum Cost of Living Payment will be paid to all carers and people on long term disability payments.

Find out more information on Blind Pension and how to apply (link <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/departments-of-social-protection/>).



## 1.3 Household Benefits Package

The Household Benefits Package helps with the cost of the TV licence and your electricity or gas bill. Only one person in a household can get this package.

You may be eligible for the Household Benefits Package, if you are in receipt of:

- Disability Allowance,
- Blind Pension,
- Invalidity Pension,
- Incapacity Supplement (for at least 12 months) with Disablement Pension (for at least 12 months),
- An equivalent Social Security Pension or Benefit from a country covered by EU Regulations, or from a country with which Ireland has a Bilateral Social Security Agreement,
- Carer's Allowance (full or half-rate payment), but you must be living with the person you are caring for.

If you have an electricity and natural gas supplier, you must choose between the Electricity Allowance and Gas Allowance.

Find out more about the Household Benefits Package and how to apply (link to <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/e87d27-household-benefits-package/>).

## 1.4 Fuel Allowance

Fuel Allowance is a payment to help with the cost of heating your home during the winter months. It is paid to people who are dependent on long-term social welfare payments and who are unable to provide for their own heating needs. Only one Fuel Allowance is paid to a household.

Fuel Allowance is generally paid with your social welfare payment on the same day. You can choose to get Fuel Allowance paid weekly or to get your total allowance paid in two lump sums. All households in receipt of the Fuel Allowance Payment will receive a €300 Lump Sum in November 2023. From January 2023, the Fuel Allowance income threshold will be increased to €200 above the applicable State Pension (Contributory) rate. For people aged over 70, increased to €500 for a single person and €1,000 for a couple.



This year's Fuel Allowance season started on Monday, 25 September 2023. It will be paid for 28 weeks (until 5 April 2024).

Find out more about the Fuel Allowance and how to apply (link to <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/00aa38-fuel-allowance/>).



## 1.5 Living Alone Increase

The Living Alone Increase is an extra weekly payment of €22 for people on social welfare payments who are living alone.

In November 2023, people with a disability receiving the Living Alone Allowance received a €200 Lump Sum Payment.

If you get Fuel Allowance and Living Alone Increase, you will get both once-off payments.

Find out more about the Living Alone Increase and how to apply (link to <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/e14dfa-living-alone-increase/>).



## 1.6 Telephone Support Allowance

If you are getting Fuel Allowance as well as the Living Alone Increase, you automatically qualify for a Telephone Support Allowance of €2.50 per week. It helps to ensure those living alone can stay connected with friends and family.

Find out more about the Telephone Support Allowance and how to apply (link <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/4d2773-telephone-support-allowance/#:~:text=Apply-,What%20Telephone%20Support%20Allowance%20is,of%20%E2%82%AC2.50%20a%20week>).

# 2. Financial Supports from HSE

## 2.1 Blind Welfare Allowance

Blind Welfare Allowance is a means-tested payment from the Health Service Executive to people, aged 18 and over, who are blind or vision impaired. You may qualify for Blind Welfare Allowance if you meet any one of these requirements:

- You get a Blind Pension from the Department of Social Protection,
- You get an income maintenance payment from the Department of Social Protection or an equivalent type payment from another country.
- You have an income below the combined Blind Pension rate and Blind Welfare Allowance rate.



Blind welfare allowance rates are as follows:

- ♦ €66.70 per week for a single person,
- ♦ €120 per week for a blind couple, where both qualify for the allowance and
- ♦ €4.40 per week for each child dependant.

You can choose to have this payment paid to you by cheque or directly into your bank account.

Find out more about Blind Welfare Allowance and how to apply (link to <https://www2.hse.ie/services/blind-welfare-allowance/>).

## 2.2 Technical Aids Grant

The Technical Aids Grant, operated by the Health Service Executive (HSE), is available to pay for the cost of assistive technology that you need for use at home in your everyday life. However, funding for the Technical Aids Grant is fragmented and you should ask your local NCBI staff whether funding has been allocated in the area that you live.

# 3. Financial Supports from Revenue



## 3.1 VAT refund on Aids and Appliances

You may get a refund of Value-Added-Tax (VAT) on certain aids and appliances that you need. The aids and appliances must be designed to assist you with your daily functions.

Find out more about VAT refund on aids and appliances (link to <https://www.revenue.ie/en/vat/repayments-to-unregistered-persons/disabled-persons/how-to-reclaim-vat-on-aids-and-appliances-for-persons-with-a-disability.aspx>).

## 3.2 Blind Person's Tax Credit

You may be able to claim the Blind Person's Tax Credit if you are in employment. If you are married or in a civil partnership and you have a vision impairment, you will receive a doubled tax credit.

The Blind Person's Tax Credit is:

- ♦ €1,650 per year for a single person,
- ♦ €1,650 where one person in a marriage or civil partnership has a vision impairment and



- ♦ €3,300 where both persons in a marriage or civil partnership has a vision impairment.

Find out more about Blind Person's Tax Credit and how to apply (link to <https://www.revenue.ie/en/personal-tax-credits-reliefs-and-exemptions/health-and-age/blind-tax-credit/index.aspx>).

### 3.3 Guide Dog Allowance

You can claim a tax credit if you own a trained guide dog. To qualify for this allowance, you must provide Revenue with a letter confirming that you are the registered owner of a guide dog from an accredited organisation such as the Irish Guide Dogs Association (link to [www.guidedogs.ie](http://www.guidedogs.ie)).

Find out more about Guide Dog Allowance (link to <https://www.revenue.ie/en/personal-tax-credits-reliefs-and-exemptions/health-and-age/guide-dog-allowance/index.aspx>).



## 4. Supports with Travel and Communication

### 4.1 Free Travel Scheme/Companion Free Travel Pass

The Free Travel Scheme allows you to travel, free of charge, on public transport and some private bus and ferry services.

Everyone aged 66 and over, living permanently in Ireland, can get the Free Travel Scheme. People with disabilities and carers aged under 66 may also qualify for Free Travel. In Budget 2024 it was confirmed that people who are blind or vision impaired and have been medically certified as being unable to drive will now be able to access the Free Travel Scheme.

If you qualify for Free Travel and you are married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting, your partner may travel with you for free if you meet certain criteria. If you can't travel alone for medical reasons, you may get Free Travel for a companion. With this pass you can travel free, alone or accompanied by one other person over the age of 16, on all public transport owned by the State. ([citizensinformation.ie](http://citizensinformation.ie))







## 4.2 Disabled Person's Parking Card

If your child's level of vision is below a level set by the Government and is aged 5 or over, they may be entitled to apply for a Disabled Person's Parking Card, which can be used in any vehicle in which the child travels. This card allows the vehicle to be parked in designated disabled parking spaces, disc parking areas and parking meter areas for an unrestricted length of time free of charge.

NCBI can provide you with a form to apply for the Disabled Person's Parking Card and we are happy to assist you with completing it.

Find out more about the Disabled Person's Parking (link to <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/801c77-disabled-parking-scheme/>).



## 4.3 Free Directory Enquiry Service

Free Directory Enquiry Service, operated by Eir, will provide you with the telephone number you request from a telephone operator free of charge. However, if you request to be connected then you will be charged. When you apply, you will receive a PIN and a letter explaining how to use this service. This service can be contacted on Tel: 1800 574 574.

# 5. Employment Supports

## 5.1 Workplace Adaptation Grant

The Workplace Adaptation Grant, funded by the Department of Social Protection, offers a grant to cover the cost of technology that you might need.

NCBI's technology service can advise and demonstrate a range of technology and give you an opportunity to try out the technology hands-on. We can also provide you with training and support with using the technology that you choose.

We can also give you a quotation for the cost of a comprehensive range of equipment which you can apply for under the Workplace Adaptation Grant.

The Job Interview Interpreter Grant, Workplace Equipment Adaption Grant and Personal Reader Grant, currently available through Intreo, will also be available through Employability providers from January 2022.

Find out more about the Workplace Adaptation Grant and how to apply (link to <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/38fdd0-workplace-equipment-adaptation-grant/>).



# Entitlements for Children

If your child's best corrected vision is 6 / 60 or below, or their field of vision is less than 20 degree, they may be entitled to claim certain entitlements from the Government.

Your child's eye specialist or local Optometrist needs to complete either an NCBI form or provide you with a letter confirming that your child's level of vision meets the criteria above. This form or letter is then submitted with an application for a Government entitlement.



If you would like to use NCBI's form, we can post it to you to bring to your child's next appointment with their eye specialist or optometrist or we can post a form directly to them on your behalf. If your child is not already seeing an eye specialist, you can ask your GP to refer them.

## 1. Financial Supports

### 1.1 Incapacitated Child Tax Credit

If your child's is under the age of 21, or over the age of 21 and is in full-time education or training for a trade or profession, for a minimum of 2 years, you can apply for an additional tax credit.

Find out more about Incapacitated Child Tax Credit

(link to <https://www.revenue.ie/en/personal-tax-credits-reliefs-and-exemptions/children/incapacitated-child-credit/index.aspx>).

### 1.2 Domiciliary Care Allowance

To qualify for Domiciliary Care Allowance, the Government states that a child must have "a severe disability requiring continual or continuous care and attention substantially in excess of the care and attention normally required by a child of the same age".



They also must be:

- ♦ aged under 16 (at 16, the child can apply for a Disability Allowance),
- ♦ Live at home with the person claiming the allowance for 5 or more days a week and
- ♦ Be ordinarily resident in the State.

Find out more about Domiciliary Care Allowance

(link to <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/30fac9-domiciliary-care-allowance/>). People receiving Domiciliary Care Allowance will get a once-off payment of €400 in November 2023. The period during which Domiciliary Care Allowance can be paid for children in hospital will be extended from 3 months to 6 months from January 2022.

When they reach 18, they may qualify for:

- ♦ Blind Pension or Disability Allowance
- ♦ Blind Welfare Allowance
- ♦ You can find out more about these payments above.

## 2. Supports with Travel

### 2.1 Companion Free Travel Pass

Your child may be entitled to a Companion Free Travel Pass.

With this pass they can travel free, alone or accompanied by one other person over the age of 16, on all public transport owned by the State. This includes bus, rail and Dublin's LUAS with some exceptions.



Free travel is also available on a limited number of services operated by private bus transport companies. Private bus transport operators that have opted in to the Free Travel Scheme accept free travel cards. You should contact the Department to check whether your private bus operator accepts Free Travel Cards.

Find out more about the Companion Free Travel Pass and how to apply (link to <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/9bba61-free-travel-scheme/>).



## 2.2 Disabled Person's Parking Card

If your child's level of vision is below a level set by the Government and is aged 5 or over, they may be entitled to apply for a Disabled Person's Parking Card, which can be used in any vehicle in which the child travels. This card allows the vehicle to be parked in designated disabled parking spaces, disc parking areas and parking meter areas for an unrestricted length of time free of charge.



NCBI can provide you with a form to apply for the Disabled Person's Parking Card and we are happy to assist you with completing it.

Find out more about the Disabled Person's Parking

(link to <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/801c77-disabled-parking-scheme/>).

## 3. Educational Supports

### 3.1 Visiting Teacher for the Visually Impaired

The Department of Education and Skills provides funding for visiting teachers for children who blind or vision impaired. The visiting teacher offers support to children, their families and schools from the time of referral through to the end of second level education. Visiting teachers are qualified teachers with particular skills and knowledge of the development and education of children with varying degrees of vision impairment.



Each visiting teacher is responsible for a particular region. Find out more information about the Visiting Teacher Service (link to <https://ncse.ie/visiting-teachers>).



### **3.2 SUSI – Student Universal Support Ireland**

If you are attending higher or further education, you may be eligible to apply for the SUSI grant. A strict means test applies. SUSI offers funding to eligible students, from school leavers to mature students returning to education, in approved full time third level courses. Find out more about the SUSI grant (link to [www.susi.ie](http://www.susi.ie)). The Student Contribution will be reduced by €1,000 for students in the 2023/2024 academic year who qualify for the Free Fees Scheme.

### **3.3 DARE – Disability Access Route to Education**

The Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) is a third level alternative admissions scheme for school leavers with disabilities. DARE offers reduced points places to school leavers who, as a result of having a disability, have experienced additional educational challenges in second level education.

Find out more about DARE (link to <https://accesscollege.ie/dare/>).

### **3.4 Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD)**

The purpose of the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) is to assist further and higher education institutions in ensuring students with disabilities have the necessary assistance and equipment to enable them access, fully participate in and successfully complete their chosen course of study.

If you are a full-time student in an approved third level course you may be eligible to receive supports including assistive technology equipment, personal assistants, notetakers, transport support and learning support.

To find out more you can visit <https://hea.ie/funding-governance-performance/funding/student-finance/fund-for-students-with-disabilities/> or contact the access officer in your further education institution.



# Frequently Asked Questions

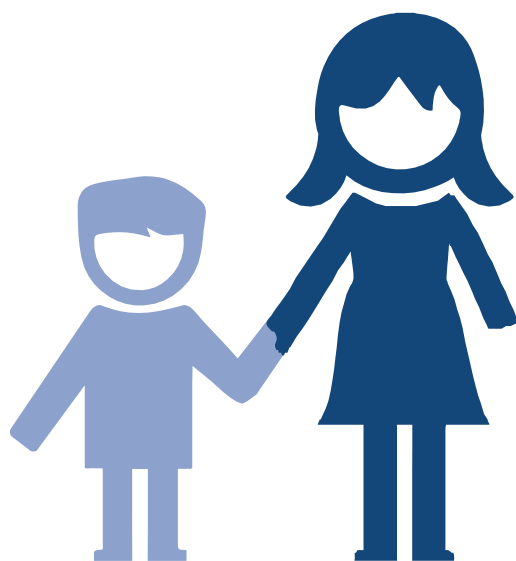
## **Will my child qualify for a medical card?**

Since 1 June 2017, all children in receipt of Domiciliary Care Allowance are eligible for a medical card without a means test.

You can find out more about Domiciliary Care Allowance and entitlement to a medical card (link to <https://www2.hse.ie/services/medical-cards/medical-card-for-domiciliary-care-allowance.html>).

## **Does my child need to be in receipt of services from NCBI to access Government entitlements?**

No, your child does not need to be receiving services from NCBI to access Government entitlements. However, there is a specific requirement set out by the Government that your child's vision must be below a certain level to avail of certain Government benefits and allowances and NCBI can help to obtain the appropriate documentation that will confirm your child's level of vision. Your child's best corrected vision must be "equal to, or less than, 6/60 in the better eye or the field of vision is limited, the widest diameter of vision subtending an angle of not greater than 20 degrees" to avail of Government benefits and allowances.



## **Can I still work and draw benefits?**

You can work, which includes self-employment, and earn up to €165 per week without your Disability Allowance or Blind Pension payment being affected. If you start work, you need to notify the Department of Social Protection and provide proof of your earnings.

50% of your earnings between €165 and €350 will not be taken into account in the Disability Allowance means test. Any earnings over €350 are fully assessed in the means test.





## **If my child / spouse / partner / mother / father has a vision impairment am I eligible for a carer's payment?**

There are two payments for those who care for an adult or child with a disability. These are Carer's Benefit and Carer's Allowance. You might qualify for a carer's payment if you are caring for someone whose level of vision is below a level set by the Government, but only if that person needs full-time care and attention because of their sight loss.

Not everyone who has a vision impairment needs full-time care and supervision. Any application for a carer's payment needs to demonstrate the extent of the person's challenges if left alone without supervision and the application needs to be supported by relevant medical reports, from NCBI, if known to NCBI, and any other relevant professionals supporting that person.

## **If I have sight in only one eye, am I entitled to benefits and allowances from the Government?**

If you have sight in only one eye this does not automatically mean you are entitled to Government benefits and allowances as the sight in your other eye will be assessed using the same criteria as if you had the use of both eyes and your vision will have to be below a level set by the Government, which is "best corrected vision in the better eye must be equal to or less than 6 / 60 or the field of vision must be limited to the extent that widest diameter of vision subtends an angle not greater than 20 degrees". So, if your vision in the better eye is still good, you will most likely not meet criteria for eligibility to entitlements from the Government in relation to your sight loss.

## **How do I know when my sight is too bad to drive anymore?**

You might have already been advised by your optician / optometrist or ophthalmologist and / or your GP that you should no longer drive. Sometimes family members and friends will have brought their concerns to you about your





driving ability. The prescribed standards for eyesight in relation to being able to drive legally are:

- ♦ that the person's visual acuity, with correction, where necessary, must not be less than 6 / 12 when using both eyes together and
- ♦ your horizontal field of vision should not be less than 150 degrees.

Your optician / optometrist is best placed to advise if your sight is meeting these standards.

When applying for a driver's licence Part 2 of the National Driving Licence Service's Eyesight Report must be completed by a medical practitioner or an optometrist confirming that your sight meets these standard.

### **Can I go on driving if I have sight in only one eye?**

Most people adapt very well to lack of sight in one eye and it is possible to go on driving, if the sight in your better eye is still good.

To drive legally with sight in only one eye your visual acuity with correction, that is, prescribed glasses or contact lenses, cannot be less than 6 / 10 and you must also have an unrestricted field of vision in the good eye. Sight loss in one of your eyes must have existed for sufficient time to allow you to adapt. Advice on this is best sought from your optometrist / optician.

When applying for or renewing your driving licence, your GP or optician will be asked to sign the eyesight report and confirm that having sight in only one eye, you still meet legal driving requirement.







# Case Studies



## Sarah, aged 8

Sarah, aged 8, was born with an eye condition called Optic Nerve Hypoplasia. Her visual acuity is 6 / 60. She receives a monthly payment of Domiciliary Care Allowance due to the additional care and support that she requires as a result of her vision impairment. This automatically qualifies her for a medical card. She also uses her Companion Free Travel Pass regularly and loves to travel on the train, this allows someone to travel free with her. Her father also claimed the Incapacitated Child Tax Credits as he is working.

## Paul, age 17

Paul, age 17, has Retinitis Pigmentosa and very reduced visual fields. At age 16, he applied for the Disability Allowance. This helped pay for some of the additional costs incurred due to his vision impairment such as taxis and low vision aids. He is doing his Leaving Cert this year and has applied to college through DARE (Disability Access Route to Education). He has received support from NCBI and from the Visiting Teacher service all the way through school and uses assistive technology to access the curriculum. He hopes to apply for funding through the Fund for Students with a Disability next year to cover the cost of any assistive technology he'll need to access his course. He's already in touch with the Disability Officer in the university for assistance and also uses his Companion Free Travel Pass regularly.

## Kevin, age 57

Kevin, age 57, was working as an electrical engineer. He was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa several years ago but recently due to significant loss of his peripheral vision and poor light-dark adaption Kevin was finding it increasingly difficult to read architectural and technical drawings and was bumping into people and objects on building sites. He had difficulty also in low light and seeing edges of steps and kerbs. On referral to NCBI, he was



for the first time able to talk about how his sight loss was affecting his life and his anxieties about his future. He also received mobility training to help him to negotiate his environment. Even though Kevin had retained his detailed vision at close range, he was having difficulty using his desktop computer. The NCBI IT worker taught him to change the settings to make it more accessible and trained him in use of different keystrokes to magnify the screen contents when needed. Upon realising he could no longer continue doing his job, NCBI advised him on what Government benefits and allowances he may be entitled to. This was done based on information received from his ophthalmologist confirming that his sight was below a level set by the Government (sometimes referred to as blind registration). This meant he could apply for the Blind Pension, a Companion Free Travel Pass, both awarded by the Department of Social Protection as well as other supports.

## Jane, age 84

Jane, age 84, has Age-related Macular Degeneration and was referred to NCBI for supports three years ago. Following an assessment, NCBI gave her to support to go on living independently by providing her with a low vision aid for reading, a large button phone and a large button TV remote control, and by placing bump-ons on the buttons on her kitchen appliances. Unfortunately, Jane's sight continued to deteriorate despite her having regular eye injections in both eyes and consequently found that none of those solutions originally provided by NCBI were working for her any longer. She began to feel quite isolated and felt nothing more could be done to help her. However, following another assessment by NCBI, she was introduced to different magnifiers to enable her to continue to read. She got advice and training to enable her to carry out her kitchen tasks independently. Jane's vision loss was below a level set by the Government for eligibility to certain benefits and allowances (sometimes referred to as blind registration), which NCBI helped her apply for.





# **NCBI**

**Working for People  
with Sight Loss**

## **NCBI can help**

**If you need assistance with applying for Government benefits and allowance, we are more than happy to help. Call our info line on Locall 1800 911 250 or email us at [info@ncbi.ie](mailto:info@ncbi.ie).**

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