



Australian Government
Department of Social Services

MC17-003466

Mr Bob Buckley
Convenor
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Dear Mr Buckley

Thank you for your email of 20 February 2017 to the Assistant Minister for Social Services and Disability Services, the Hon Jane Prentice MP, regarding the Disability Support Pension (DSP). The Assistant Minister has asked me to reply to you on her behalf.

As you would be aware, DSP is designed to give people an adequate means of support if they have a permanent physical, intellectual or psychiatric impairment which attracts at least 20 points under the *Tables for the Assessment of Work-related Impairment for Disability Support Pension* (the Impairment Tables). The person must also be assessed as being unable to work for 15 or more hours a week, for at least the next two years.

The Impairment Tables contain 15 individual Tables that are specifically designed to assess work-related impairment rather than whole person impairment. The Tables are therefore function-based rather than diagnosis-based and describe functional activities, abilities, symptoms and limitations that affect an individual's ability to work. The Tables do not list specific conditions such as autism – each person's level of impairment is assessed on an individual basis to account for the varying spectrum of severity and stability that can occur with medical conditions.

Before being assessed under the Impairment Tables, a condition must be considered to be permanent, which means that it is fully diagnosed, treated and stabilised, and it is unlikely that there will be any significant functional improvement within the next two years.

A person with Autism Spectrum Disorder with an IQ above 85 is assessed under Table 7 – Brain Function. A person with Autism Spectrum Disorder who has an IQ of 85 or below can be assessed under Table 9 – Intellectual Function. If a person with Autism Spectrum Disorder has conditions which affects other areas of functioning, these are assessed using the other Tables as appropriate.

You may be interested to know that the Impairment Tables are available publically at www.legislation.gov.au/Series/F2011L02716. More information about the Impairment Tables can be found in the *Guidelines to the Tables for the Assessment of Work-related Impairment for Disability Support Pension (the Tables)*, available at www.guides.dss.gov.au/guide-social-security-law/3/6/3.

In response to Questions 1 and 2, I can advise that information about how to claim DSP is available on the DHS website at www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/disability-support-pension. The website contains links to information about eligibility for DSP, how to lodge a claim as well as information about the assessment process.

A Department of Human Services (Centrelink) social worker can provide short-term counselling, support and information to help claimants. Social workers can also direct claimants to other supports and services to assist them. Social workers can be contacted by phoning 13 2850 or by visiting local Service Centres. Please note that calls to this number from a landline are charged at the cost of a local call. Calls made from mobile or pay phones may incur additional costs.

In response to Question 3, most people who claim for DSP undergo a Job Capacity Assessment (JCA) to determine the impact of their medical condition and disabilities on their ability to work. JCAs are conducted by qualified health or allied health professionals employed by the Department of Human Services (DHS). Assessors are from a range of disciplines (including Registered Psychologists, Social Workers, Registered Nurses, Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists and Rehabilitation Counsellors) and have a broad range of experience and skills relevant to conduct high quality assessments. DHS employees with professional qualifications are required to maintain their qualification and accreditation through meeting the Continuing Professional Development requirements as set out in their relevant membership condition. This includes keeping up to date with current research in their area of expertise.

In addition to this, DHS conducts annual internal refresher training on a range of topics pertinent to the assessment role, hosts webinars on assessing specific medical conditions, and also has regular communication to all staff detailing any changes or concerns regarding the assessment process. Assessors can also source assistance from DHS' Health Professional Advisory Unit (HPAU) with complex assessments.

Since 1 July 2015, any new claim for DSP may be referred for a Disability Medical Assessment (DMA) as a part of the assessment process. DMAs are conducted by a Government-Contracted Doctor (GCD). All GCDs are qualified and trained to carry out these assessments.

Thank you again for writing.

Yours sincerely



Russell de Burgh
Branch Manager

28 March 2017