

## ASK THE ADVISER

17) ATTENDANCE ALLOWANCE - The latest in a series of articles by Iain Gregory of Caithness CAB

A couple of years ago Liz and I decided to have a long weekend in Glasgow. This was because both of us had frequently passed through or attended meetings there, but had not really had the chance to get to know the city. We stayed in a nice hotel with a very helpful receptionist - everyone seems to be helpful in Glasgow in the same way that Bill Bryson said in his book "Notes from a Small Island" that "everyone was helpful in Thurso". She kindly provided us with what she called "concessions" to allow us a reduction on the open top bus tours. The next day I proffered same to the driver who handed me two remarkably cheap tickets and I realised that he had given us over - 60's concessions. This was not well received by Liz and with typical Glasgow quick-thinking the driver advised that "well, she got a student's concession and as for you just sit in a corner and drool if an Inspector gets on". Brilliant!

It does have to be said that as the years pass what was once a V8 might tend to run on a few less cylinders and all of us are prone to one form of health issue or another and might just need some help - hopefully not for a long time yet, but we all need to know what is available to us. I have noticed that a lot of older people are not aware of the assistance that is [out there](#), or they do not want to take what they see as "charity". Well, after some 50 years of subsidising HMG you are entitled to get something back - you have paid for it after all. We have talked before about things like free TV Licences, Help with Heating Costs and Bus Passes, but today I want to tell you about Attendance Allowance because I know that many people simply do not know that it exists.

So what is Attendance Allowance? For a start you need to be 65 or over to make a claim. You also need to have a disability or illness that makes it hard to look after yourself - perhaps you need help with some of your day to day activities due to physical problems such as arthritis or you are suffering from dementia - there are many different conditions which mean you can make a claim and we will go into that a bit later on. There is no doubt that lots of people are entitled to claim AA, but don't know enough about it to claim. You can get £55.10 or £83.20 a week - the amount you get will depend on how much help you need - and the thing to remember is that you can spend the money however you like - many people use it to allow them to stay in their own home longer or perhaps to increase their ability to get about and do their own shopping by paying for a taxi to take them to or from the town. The other huge advantage is that AA is not means tested so it really doesn't matter what other money you get. Nor does it matter what savings you have - there is no limit. It won't affect your state pension (or any other pension) and you can even claim it if you are still working and earning a wage. A good example of this concerned a friend of mine in Inverness who was totally unable to leave her wheelchair, but was absolutely determined to work as long as she could

and used her AA to pay for taxis to and from her office where she did a brilliant job and continued to pay tax and contribute to society - far better than being confined to her home. This is one of the occasions where the Government have got it right - AA is an entitlement that really does enhance the quality of people's lives.

So should you make a claim and how do you go about it? Firstly, have a think about how your condition(s) affect you. Do you need some help or supervision throughout the day or at times during the night? (Even if you are currently not getting that help). Do you need help with personal care - getting dressed; getting in or out of bed; bathing or showering? Do day-to-day tasks cause you pain? Do you need help to stay safe? (For example do you have a hearing or visual issue?) Does one of your friends or family have learning difficulties? All of these things need to be considered and if you or someone else is experiencing problems then it is worth making a claim. The claim form is by no means short and sweet and the "Plain English" campaign supporters would have a fit if they saw it, but fear not - CCAB is at hand. We employ Welfare Rights Officers who have all the facts and figures at their fingertips and the person who does most of the AA forms has a wealth of experience in making sure that not only the nature of your conditions, but the effects that they have upon your quality of life are properly explained thus ensuring that you have the best possible chance of a successful claim.

You can always contact us and have chat before going for a claim so please get in touch.

Now, it stands to reason that if you need care then someone has to give that care and that brings us neatly to Carer's Allowance. The person looking after you - perhaps your partner or a friend or someone else as you wish - might be able to claim Carer's Allowance if you get Attendance Allowance. They can claim if they spend at least 35 hours a week looking after you - and this is easily achieved - and they get less than £110 per week (after tax etc) from say a job or a pension. We have argued long and loud at Caithness CAB that CA should be non means-tested and I have submitted a couple of papers on that topic in the last month. The Scottish Government are looking at this in depth at the moment and it does look as if changes might well take place when they take over some of the current "benefits" in due course. Either way, we will advise you and keep you on the right track.

Finally, if you are already getting Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment or if you are 64 and thinking about claiming AA at 65 do please get in touch with us - it can get technical but we will advise you about the advantages of continuing to claim DLA / PIP or perhaps claiming PIP before you are 65 - you may be better off. As always contact CCAB.

So there we are - a complex subject but we will sort it out for you. And, on that note, I am now going to establish whether I have earned my entitlement to claim my Sunday dinner, with just perhaps a small snifter of malt.