

60) ATTENTANCE ALLOWANCE - The latest in a series of articles by Iain Gregory of Caithness CAB

Before too long I have a very significant birthday. No, I am not going to tell you my age, but various dis-respectful suggestions have been made as to the nature of gifts I might like to receive. Well, my assorted offspring can forget anything designed for more mature citizens. What I want is a day on the Nurburgring in a Focus RS with a demo drive by Sabine Schmitz and then a few laps to try and match her time. I might follow this by climbing the odd alp and indulging in satisfactory quantities of malt and cigars. So there!

Which brings me very neatly to today's topic – Attendance Allowance. Recently, we have found that many older people are completely unaware that this benefit exists and they are losing a lot of money as a result. The reason for this is that it is not exactly widely publicised, and huge sums of money go unclaimed each year. So what is it? Well, for a start you need to be 65 or over and you also need to have a disability or illness that makes it hard for you to look after yourself. Say for example that you need help or supervision with your personal care throughout the day or at times during the night (even if you don't currently get that help). Perhaps you have problems getting dressed, eating or drinking, getting in and out of bed, bathing or showering and going to the toilet. You may need help to stay safe or you might have difficulties with personal tasks – maybe they take you a long time, you experience pain or you need physical help, like a chair to lean on. You should also claim if you need help or supervision because you have a mental health condition, learning difficulties or a sensory condition - for example if you're deaf or blind. You can spend the money as you like - it could help you stay independent in your own home, cover the cost of a taxi to go shopping or even to pay for a cleaner or a gardener – it is entirely up to you. Attendance Allowance isn't means tested so it doesn't matter what other money you get. It doesn't matter how much you have in savings either - there's no limit. It won't affect your state pension and you can claim it even if you're still working and earning money.

Now, the claim form is more than a bit daunting and lots of people take one look and give up. Please don't. The first step is to give CCAB a phone and have a chat. We can then order the form for you and we will help you fill it in. Our Welfare rights Officers are experts and will make sure that you have the best possible chance of a successful claim. And if you are granted AA then this means that someone can also claim Carer's Allowance for looking after you – perhaps a relative or a friend (subject to income rules). You can also apply for a Blue Badge for parking and a Disabled Person's Railcard. We might also be able to get you a Council Tax Reduction. All of this worthwhile - so please call us.

Now, I just hope all my progeny read this article.....