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Is your retiree client eligible for a Centrelink concession card?

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Retirees have access to a range of concession cards, and some are able to access more than one card at a same time. These cards offer a variety of concessions to the card holder. Benefits can include medicines being available at a lower cost under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme or access to subsidised hearing devices.

This article:

- outlines the eligibility and portability rules for the Pensioner Concession Card (PCC), Low Income Health Care Card (LIHCC) and the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card (CSHC); and
- compares the benefits available with each of them.

Eligibility

The type of concession card your client will be eligible for will be based on their age and specific circumstances. Broadly, a PCC is issued to pensioners, a LIHCC to those on lower income regardless of their age and a CSHC to those above Age Pension age and who do not qualify for any social security payment. These cards are issued by Centrelink/Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) based on the eligibility criteria as explained in Table 1 below.

Broadly, a PCC is issued to pensioners, a LIHCC to those on lower income regardless of their age and a CSHC to those above Age Pension age and who do not qualify for any social security payment.

Table 1: Eligibility criteria issued by Centrelink/Department of Veterans' Affairs

Criteria	Pensioner Concession Card	Low Income Health Care Card	Commonwealth Seniors Health Card
Basic eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is automatically issued to recipients of the following social security payments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recipients of Age Pension, Carer Payment, Disability Support Pension and Parenting Payment (Single), Department of Veterans' Affairs Service Pension war widows receiving Income Support Supplement Individuals aged 60 or over who receive a JobSeeker Payment, Parenting Payment (partnered) and Special Benefit, and has been in continuous receipt of the payment for at least 39 weeks Recipients of JobSeeker Payment or Youth allowance, who have partial capacity to work¹ or are single, carers for a dependent child Parenting Payment (partnered) and have partial capacity to work¹ Meet residency rules³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aged 19 or over² Have income under the income test limits Meet residency rules³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age Pension age or over Age 60 or over for a veteran with qualifying service, or Do not qualify for a Social Security Pension⁴, Social Security Benefit⁴, DVA Service Pension or Income Support Supplement Have income under the income test limits Meet residency rules³

A Pensioner Concession Card is automatically issued to recipients of certain social security payments.

1 Having a physical, intellectual or psychiatric impairment that prevents them from working for at least 30 hours a week at the minimum wage or above within the next two years.
 2 Those under age 19 are eligible if they are independent or eligible for Family Tax Benefit.
 3 Broadly, needs to reside in Australia and either be an Australian citizen or is a permanent visa holder or Special Category visa (SCV) holder who is a protected SCV holder. For more information refer to the residency rules explained in the guide to social security law.
 4 Social security pension includes Age Pension, Disability Support Pension, Carer Payment; Parenting Payment (single). Sole Parent Pension; and Special Needs Pension. Social Security Benefit includes JobSeeker Payment, Youth Allowance, Austudy Payment, Benefit PP (partnered), Special Benefit and Parenting Allowance (other than non-benefit allowance).

Criteria	Pensioner Concession Card	Low Income Health Care Card	Commonwealth Seniors Health Card
Means test applicable	Eligibility dependent on accessing a social security payment listed above, unless holding a non-means tested card due to the 1 January 2017 assets test changes (see section below)	Income test applies ⁵ No assets test	Income test applies unless holding a non-means tested card due to the 1 January 2017 assets test changes (see section below) No assets test
Assessable income and assets	Income and assets tests based on qualifying payment	Income that will be assessed includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ordinary income⁶; • Social Security Pension⁴; • Social Security Benefit⁴; • Department of Veterans' Affairs Pension or Income Support Supplement⁸; • Payment of compensation⁹; • Foreign Pension; • Income from private trusts and companies; and • Lump sum payments – redundancy, leave, or termination payments. 	Income that will be assessed includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjusted Taxable Income⁷; and • Deemed income from account-based pensions¹⁰.

5 Gross income is assessed using the average assessable weekly income for eight weeks before the date on which the claim is submitted.

6 For social security purposes.

7 Adjusted Taxable Income includes taxable income, (disregarding any First Home Super Savers Scheme released amounts), total net investment losses, target foreign income, employer provided fringe benefits and reportable superannuation contributions.

8 Under Veterans' Entitlement Act 1986.

9 As defined in section 17 of the Social Security Act 1991.

10 Excludes pensions commenced before 1 January 2015 that meets the eligibility for grandfathering rules.

Criteria	Pensioner Concession Card	Low Income Health Care Card	Commonwealth Seniors Health Card
Means test thresholds	<p>Thresholds only applicable to payments with which the PCC is issued.</p> <p>There are no separate thresholds to be eligible for PCC.</p>	<p>Weekly income^{11,12} should be less than:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$757 (single, no children); • \$1,295 (couple combined, no children); • \$1,295 (single, one dependent¹³ child); • \$1,329 (couple combined, one dependent child); and • \$34 added for each additional dependent child. 	<p>Annual income¹¹ should be less than:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$95,400 (singles); • \$152,640 (couples); and • \$190,800 (illness separated).
May also be eligible for	LIHCC	PCC or CSHC	LIHCC

Means test cut-off limits for the concession cards

The following tables outline the various income and asset cut-off thresholds for the concession cards. Note, that means tests differ across all the three concession cards.

Pensioner Concession card

Table 2 below lists the upper income and assets test thresholds beyond which an individual loses their pension and as a result their PCC. Different cut-off thresholds apply to PCC recipients receiving an allowance.

Table 2: Upper income and assets test thresholds

	Income limit (p.a.) ¹¹	Asset limit ¹¹
Single Homeowner	\$62,332.40	\$667,500
Couple Homeowner	\$95,336.80	\$1,003,000
Single Non-homeowner	\$62,332.40	\$909,500
Couple Non-homeowner	\$95,336.80	\$1,245,000

Where an individual loses their pension due to an increase in their or their partner's employment income, they can generally retain the PCC for two years after the end of the installment period in which the pension ceases.

Low Income Health Care Card

Unlike PCC, the assessment for the LIHCC is only based on an income test. Table 3 below includes the income limit and the level of financial assets (subject to deeming) beyond which an individual:

- does not initially qualify for the LIHCC; and
- cannot retain the LIHCC.

¹¹ Current threshold as at 20 September 2023.

¹² To retain the card, the weekly income should be less than 125% of the above thresholds.

¹³ Generally, under age 16, however the definition can vary based on circumstances. See [1.1.D.70](#) in the Guide to Social Security Law.

Table 3: The income limit and the level of financial assets for the LIHCC

	Income limit to apply (p.a.)¹¹	Asset limit for applicable deemed income	Income limit to retain (p.a.)¹¹	Asset limit to retain for applicable deemed income
Single	\$39,364	\$1,803,200	\$49,205	\$2,240,577
Couple	\$67,340	\$3,081,955	\$84,175	\$3,830,177

Commonwealth Seniors Health card

Although the CSHC is based solely on the income test like LIHCC, the definition of income differs significantly. The income assessed for CSHC is based on Adjusted Taxable Income and deemed income from account-based pensions.

Table 4 below shows the income limit beyond which an individual is not eligible to receive or lose their CSHC. The right most column also shows the level of assets on which the calculated deemed income equates to the income limit depicted on the left below.

Table 4: Income limit beyond which an individual is not eligible to receive or loses their CSHC

	Income limit (p.a.)¹¹	Asset limit¹¹
Single	\$95,400	\$4,293,688
Couple	\$152,640	\$6,873,066

Assumptions: All assets are subject to deeming and includes account-based pension of \$400,000 for singles and \$800,000 for couples. The remaining assets earn taxable income of 2.25%.

Benefits

Table 5 below explains the common concessions available in all states. Generally, the PCC offers the most benefits.

State, territory and local governments may provide additional concessions to card holders like concessional fares on public transport, discounted property and utility rates or discount on motor vehicle registration charges. These differ from state to state. For more detailed information on the benefits, please refer to the article '[How much is a pensioner concession card worth](#)'.

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¹¹ Current threshold as at 20 September 2023.

Table 5: Common concessions available in all states

Criteria	Pensioner Concession Card	Low Income Health Care Card	Commonwealth Seniors Health Card
Discounted rate on medicines listed under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme	✓	✓	✓
Bulk Billing for doctors' appointments ¹⁴	✓	✓	✓
Discounted out-of-hospital medical expenses above the concessional threshold of the Medicare Safety Net	✓	✓	✓
Access to subsidised hearing services program ¹⁵	✓	✗	✗
Discounts on certain services provided by Australia Post, e.g. mail re-direction	✓	✓	✓

Note: Individuals can get a digital copy of their health or concession card on their smart device by downloading the Express Plus Centrelink mobile app.

Renewal

The rules differ based on time frame and process when it comes to renewal of these cards. These are outlined in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Renewal of cards

Criteria	Pensioner Concession Card	Low Income Health Care Card	Commonwealth Seniors Health Card
Time frame for renewal	Two years ¹⁶	One year	Two years
When to renew	Automatically renewed after two years from the date the individual qualifies for the payment. Individual does not need to apply for the renewal.	Individual needs to apply for renewal after a year.	Automatically renewed on the individual's birthday after two years. Individual does not need to apply for the renewal. ¹⁷

14 The Government provides financial incentives for GPs to bulk-bill concession cardholders however this is at the discretion of the doctor.

15 Includes free hearing test, subsidised hearing aids, maintenance of hearing aids and ongoing support from qualified professionals.

16 Generally, if the qualifying payment is stopped, the card will be cancelled.

17 Continuing eligibility is checked when Centrelink and the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) match records twice a year.

Portability

A person leaving Australia permanently should have their concession card cancelled immediately upon departure. If the recipients depart Australia temporarily, their cards are generally cancelled after the non-cancellation period.

Recipients must notify Centrelink about their departure and if known, their expected return date before leaving Australia. After returning, recipients must notify Centrelink of their date of arrival to ensure their concession entitlement continues. Table 7 outlines when cards are cancelled when travelling outside Australia.

Table 7: Cancellation of cards when travelling outside Australia

Criteria	Pensioner Concession Card	Low Income Health Care Card	Commonwealth Seniors Health Card
Travel outside Australia	<p>The card is cancelled when the recipient:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> is temporarily absent from Australia for longer than six weeks (four weeks in a 12-month period for Disability Support Pension recipients); or permanently departs Australia. 	<p>The card is cancelled when the recipient:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> is temporarily absent from Australia for longer than six weeks; or permanently departs Australia. 	<p>The card is cancelled when the recipient:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> is temporarily absent from Australia for longer than 19 weeks; or permanently departs Australia.

A person leaving Australia permanently should have their concession card cancelled immediately upon departure. If the recipients depart Australia temporarily, their cards are generally cancelled after the non-cancellation period.

Non-means tested cards

On 1 January 2017 when changes were made to the pension assets test, some individuals lost their pension and their PCC. As a result, Centrelink issued a non-income tested LIHCC to those who were under pension age or CSHC to those who were pension age and over. However, on 9 October 2017, they reinstated the PCC those who were impacted.

When the non-income tested PCC was reinstated, the non-income tested LIHC was cancelled. However, those that were issued the non-income tested CSHC were allowed to retain the card in order to continue receiving the energy supplement.

Recipients who hold the non-income tested CSHC and the PCC do not need to meet any income test rules. They will receive these cards indefinitely irrespective of the change in their income. However, these recipients may lose the card temporarily if they depart Australia for a time frame that exceeds the non-cancellation period. On return to Australia, their cards will be reinstated.

Notification for change of circumstances

The cardholders have a responsibility to inform Centrelink if there is any change in their personal, business or financial circumstances. If there is a change, they have an obligation to notify Centrelink within 14 days of the change.

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