



29th July 2021

Deputy Gary Gannon,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

PQ 20858/21 - To ask the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to regional variation that exists in the payment of blind welfare payment with many HSE offices refusing to make the payment electronically and forcing persons who are blind or vision impaired to travel, unnecessarily, to collect the payment by cheque; if he will mandate payment to be offered electronically for service users nationally, similar to other statutory payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

- Gary Gannon

Dear Deputy Gannon,

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question (PQ 20858/21), which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

Blind Welfare Allowance (BWA) is part of special services for blind persons under the Blind Persons Act, 1920. It is a means-tested payment from the HSE to people, aged 18 and over, who are blind or visually impaired. In response to your query, we have established that the majority of CHO areas have arrangements in place to offer electronic payment to recipients of Blind Welfare Allowance by Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT).

Please see attached Appendix 1, which sets out the position in each CHO area. For those areas who do not have a method of electronic payment to all recipients, you will note that Kerry LHO intends to increase the number of recipients who can avail of Electronic Payment by July/ August 2021. In Laois/Offaly LHO, whilst electronic payments are available to new applicants, payments to existing recipients are by cheque. While they intend to move to offer electronic payments to this cohort, a time frame for this has not been specified.

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

Maeve Raeside
General Manager Primary Care
National Community Operations

Appendix 1

CHO	Position regarding Payment of Blind Welfare Allowance
CHO 1	In March 2020, all recipients were contacted seeking their bank details to switch to electronic payments. The majority of people have opted for electronic payments, with a small number of exceptions where a recipient specifically requested payment by cheque. All new applicants have been offered the choice to have their payments made by cheque or electronic transfer.
CHO 2	Both methods of payment are currently in use. All new claimants are given the option of payment by EFT or cheque. Changes in payment methods are normally implemented by the Finance Department. A number of years ago claimants were given the option to move to payment by EFT; not all have availed of it.
CHO 3	Payments are made by cheque or by EFT, whichever is the preference of the recipient. Electronic transfer payments were introduced in early 2020.
CHO 4	<p>In Kerry, the current method of payment for a service user upon commencement of receipt of Blind Welfare Allowance is initially via cheque. Upon undertaking the Annual Review of Blind Welfare Allowance recipients for 2021, it is intended that for service users not currently in receipt of EFT payment, a bank form will be enclosed with their review form to enable them to avail of EFT. It is anticipated that an additional number of recipients will avail of the EFT option, thus increasing the overall number of service users in receipt of EFT. The estimated time frame for this initiative is July/August 2021.</p> <p>For the Cork area, all of the Blind Welfare Recipients in Cork city and county were offered an opportunity and were encouraged to have their Blind Welfare payments paid electronically last year due to the COVID-19 crisis. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the option for electronic payments was open to all applicants and continues to remain so.</p>
CHO 5	Payments are made by EFT and cheque. Service users who wish to receive their payments by EFT are facilitated.
CHO 6	Community Healthcare East offer recipients of the Blind Welfare Allowance the option to receive this allowance by EFT.
CHO 7	Payments are made by both EFT and cheque. Correspondence has been issued to recipients of cheques on a number of occasions advising that the HSE has the facility to process payments by means of EFT, whereby payments would be lodged directly to a Bank or Credit Union account of the payee's choice. There was not a great uptake and the number of cheque recipients remains quite high. Bank details are now requested from all new applicants.
CHO 8	<p>Payments are made by both EFT and cheque.</p> <p>In Laois/Offaly, historical payments are by cheque. All new applicants complete a form which sets them up electronically. It is hoped for everyone to be set up for EFT eventually.</p> <p>In Longford/Westmeath, correspondence is sent to recipients on a regular basis to encourage to change from cheque to EFT. New applicants are required to fill out a vendor form with bank account details.</p> <p>In Meath, the majority of service users are paid electronically. The service users that receive payment by cheque have requested this, as they do not have bank or credit union accounts.</p> <p>In Louth, correspondence is sent to recipients on a regular basis to change from cheque to EFT.</p>
CHO 9	The vast majority of payments are paid monthly by EFT. However there are service users who are paid by cheque as they do not have a bank or post office account that their allowance can be paid into. All new recipients of Blind Welfare Allowance are encouraged to receive payments by EFT but it is not always possible for the reasons outlined above.