

Senior Services



DECEMBER 2010



A word from Merv

2010 has been hugely busy and it never ceases to amaze me just how fast Christmas comes around every year.



Highlights of 2010 for me include bringing together all of Senior Services to include NZ Superannuation staff around the country, the launch of the NZ Superannuation online application, and the continued growth of the SuperGold Card.

In this newsletter, enjoy reading about the latest SuperGold special offers initiative, the abolition of gift duty, and questions and answers relating to annual reviews and Disability Allowance reviews.

I wish you all a relaxing and safe Christmas.

Regards, Merv Dacre

General Manager, Senior Services.



Service improvements project

Work on streamlining some of our processes for seniors is progressing well within Senior Services. This includes making better use of information already held by the Ministry and other government agencies and simplifying the application process for NZ Superannuation.

We have reviewed the letter issued by Inland Revenue inviting people approaching 65 to apply for NZ Superannuation. The focus of this review was to clarify the eligibility criteria and when to apply, and to promote the online NZ Superannuation application process. The updated letter will be issued from December 2010.

The NZ Superannuation application form has also been reviewed to improve the clarity and flow of questions, and to reduce the length of the form. The first draft of the new form will be tested with a sample group of clients over the next eight weeks.

If you know anyone who might be interested in participating in this exercise, please email us at: seniors_project_team@msd.govt.nz.

IF YOU WISH TO SUBMIT STORIES/MORE INFORMATION

Email: seniors@msd.govt.nz

Post: Information and Reporting Team, Senior Services, PO Box 1556, Wellington 6140



MINISTRY OF
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora



Feedback from SuperGold business partners and clients



The SuperGold Card has gone from strength to strength since it was launched in 2007.

We have increased the number of business partners from 188 to 1,301 and the number of outlets from 2,215 to 5,553. It's time now for us to look at future opportunities for the card and how we can further enhance its value for both business partners and clients.

We recently conducted three roundtable discussions with some of our larger business partners.

In November we also ran focus groups, some in association with Age Concern, with senior clients to get their ideas about how we could improve the SuperGold programme.

Invaluable feedback was given on a wide range of topics including the current SuperGold directory, the use of internet and email to disseminate SuperGold information, and further potential SuperGold opportunities.

New Special Offers webpage: SuperGold now has a special offers page. To find out about special offers clients can:

- visit SuperGold Online at: www.supergold.govt.nz
- receive email updates on the latest offers by emailing their name, email address, client number and postal address to us at: seniors@msd.govt.nz



Phone calls welcomed by older people after earthquake

As we know the earthquake on 5 September has had a huge impact on the people of Christchurch.

We were very conscious of the impact on older people and particularly those living alone.

In the few days after the quake we telephoned over 18,000 clients to check they were safe.

Feedback we received during the call outs included:

"My nana rang me to ask how she could give feedback about the phone call she received to make sure she was ok. She really appreciated it after such a traumatic experience for her. Her home was a mess, thankfully the structure is sound! She said receiving a call from MSD to make sure she was ok because she lives alone was really heart-warming!"

"I just wanted to say a big THANK YOU for the kind and courteous call from someone representing your organisation asking if I was OK, if there was anything I needed and to reassure me that my pension would continue to be paid. THANK YOU. THANK YOU. THANK YOU. It is getting to the stage where sleep deprivation is setting in - but knowing that someone cares is a comfort".

A huge effort was put in by many government and non-government organisations and it was great to see the agencies come together to continue the delivery of services.



Older persons celebrations

On 1 October each year the United Nations International Day of Older Persons is celebrated. It's an opportunity to acknowledge older people and their contribution to society, to their families and in the wider community.

We took part in a range of local and national events including participating in 15 expos and other events throughout the country. These events were held in conjunction with Age Concern, local councils and a range of elder abuse and neglect prevention services groups.



Age Concern, supported by Hamilton City Council, promoted Age Concern Awareness Week with a main event on 28 September, 2010 in the Civic Plaza, Hamilton. The programme provided information on positive ageing along with light entertainment. Pictured are Zumba Gold (above) and the pancake competition and sausage sizzle (below).



Abolition of gift duty to go ahead

The Government has confirmed that it intends to abolish gift duty. This will take effect from 1 October 2011.

The changes mean that asset transfers (gifting) will be able to be made almost immediately without the restrictions that currently exist where transfers/gifting must be less than \$27,000 a year to avoid gift duty.

We don't expect this change to have a significant impact on a client's financial means assessment for Residential Care Subsidy.

The existing legislation under which these assessments are carried out already contains a 'look back' provision which enables asset transfers (gifting) to be considered in the assessment process.



Apply online for NZ Superannuation

Turning 65? People can now apply online for NZ Superannuation.

We now have around 13% of applicants using the online application process. Feedback from applicants about the application has been positive. They tell us it gives them more choice and control over how they apply for NZ Superannuation and makes the process easier for them.

Apply online on the Senior Services website: www.seniors.msd.govt.nz.

Apply for
NZ Super  



Frequently asked questions about Disability Allowance reviews

In August 2008, MSD Senior Services made changes to streamline Disability Allowance annual reviews. Many clients no longer have an Annual Review form sent but instead may receive an Annual Circumstances letter. Some clients now don't receive anything. The frequently asked questions below could be helpful to answer queries from clients.

How have Senior Services changed the Annual Review process?

Senior Services have made some changes to the way they do Annual Reviews. Since August 2008, some people will receive an Annual Circumstances letter instead of an Annual Review form.

If a client receives an Annual Circumstances letter, what should they do?

It is important that the client reads their letter and calls Senior Services only if their personal circumstances change or if any of the details in the letter are not correct. If the information in the letter is correct, they don't have to do anything.

Will a client get this letter every year?

A client could receive an Annual Review form or Annual Circumstances letter depending on their circumstances.

If a client doesn't get an Annual Review form, how do they know that they are getting all they are entitled to?

If a client needs help they can call Senior Services who can help with a range of things, for example housing, health and emergency costs, or they can put the client in touch with other services. It's important that a client tells Senior Services if their circumstances have changed. When a client calls, Senior Services

will talk to them about their situation to offer all the help and support they can.

Will a client get sent a Disability Certificate to take to their doctor about their Disability Allowance?

With the changes Senior Services have made to Disability Allowance reviews, a client only gets a Disability Certificate when their medical condition is due for reassessment. This means, for Disability Allowance purposes a client only needs to visit their doctor when they would like any new costs included or if their disability or medical condition is due for reassessment.

What does a client do if their disability costs have changed?

If the costs a client already has included in their Disability Allowance increase, they need to tell Senior Services and provide proof of the new amount. If the client has new costs associated with their disability or medical condition they will need to provide proof of these costs and have their doctor complete a Disability Certificate so Senior Services can include this in their Disability Allowance. If a client's costs have reduced or stopped, all they have to do is tell Senior Services.

If a client is receiving a Disability Allowance and didn't receive a letter or a review form, what should they do?

Some clients won't receive an annual form or letter to review their Disability Allowance. It may be because they are in residential care or because Senior Services have already talked with them during the year about the costs included in their Disability Allowance. However, clients can call Senior Services anytime to check if they are receiving their correct entitlement.

Clients can contact Senior Services on either:

- 0800 552 002 for New Zealand Superannuation
- 0800 650 656 Veteran's Pension Centre.



What is normal memory loss?

Submitted by Cass Alexander, Alzheimers New Zealand



We have all heard the term, 'senior moments' to describe little lapses in memory. It is normal to an extent to have some memory deterioration with age. However, dementia, a neurological disease affecting memory, cognitive function, daily activities, mood and personality, is not a part of normal ageing.

Over 43,000 people in New Zealand have dementia, with this number expected to rise to over 146,000 by 2050. Dementia is the over-arching word for a group of diseases, including Alzheimer's disease which is the most common (50-70 per cent) and vascular dementia, caused by stroke/s, which is the second most common (20-30 per cent), as well as other forms.

Many people struggle with dementia without getting a diagnosis. If your memory is affecting your day-to-day life, it is best to talk to your GP.

Normal forgetfulness can include:

- walking into a room and forgetting what you are there for
- misplacing your keys
- not remembering a specific place or brand name, for example, or the name of an acquaintance.

More serious forms of forgetfulness include:

- difficulty performing everyday tasks
- problems with language
- repeatedly misplacing things and putting them in inappropriate places
- changes in mood, personality and loss of initiative.

Not all memory problems are symptoms of dementia. Depression, stress and the side effects of medication can cause memory problems, and even urinary tract infections can cause delirium which can mimic dementia. But if it is dementia, an early diagnosis means you and your family can access appropriate support services, meet others in a similar position and be well-informed about what to expect and how to modify your life to make things easier.

Alzheimers New Zealand has 23 local organisations which provide support, education and information. Please call 0800 004 001 or visit www.alzheimers.org.nz for more information.



Reminders

Visit the Senior Services website

If people need information about entitlements, support or how to get in touch with us visit the seniors website: www.seniors.msd.govt.nz

Ask a Question on our website

If clients have questions and need answers they can use our Ask a Question tool on our website: www.seniors.msd.govt.nz

The quickest way to get an answer to your question is to search our *Find Answers* page.

Email updates

People can now receive seniors-related information from us by emailing the following details to us at: seniors@msd.govt.nz

- Name and Address
- Client number (found on the back of the SuperGold card)
- Email address.