

**General Dental and Ophthalmic Services
Branch
PRIMARY CARE DIRECTORATE**



**To: All General Dental and Ophthalmic
Contractors**

BY EMAIL

Primary Care Directorate
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Date: 5 November 2025

Dear Colleague

Automatic passporting to Help with Health Costs scheme for Universal Credit claimants to be introduced from 1 December 2025

I am writing to inform you that the *Travelling Expenses and Remission of Charges Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004* have been amended to ensure that eligible Universal Credit recipients are automatically passported to the Help with Health Costs scheme. These changes, which bring Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the UK, will take effect from **1 December 2025**.

A press release from the Health Minister on the changes can be found at the link below:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/news/automatic-passporting-help-health-costs-scheme-be-reinstated-december>

The Department of Health has worked closely with the Department for Communities to implement this legislation and ensure a smooth transition for both patients and providers.

From 1 December, eligible Universal Credit recipients will be automatically passported to the Help with Health Costs (HwHC) scheme, without the requirement to complete an HC1 form or undergo assessment.

Eligible recipients are entitled to:

- **Free sight tests**
- **Free dental treatment**
- **Reimbursement of travel costs for health and social care treatment**

Not all Universal Credit recipients will be automatically eligible for the Help with Health Costs scheme. As in Great Britain, an earnings threshold will apply in Northern Ireland to determine eligibility. Patients who are not automatically passported can still apply under the Low-Income Scheme to have their eligibility assessed prior to treatment.

The Department for Communities will issue advice to Universal Credit claimants on the impact of these changes in the coming weeks. Practices should continue to advise patients to check their entitlement.

To coincide with the 1 December 2025 introduction of passporting and to reflect this new category of charge exemption, BSO will be issuing updated paper claim forms and amending online/electronic claiming systems. Further guidance, including materials to help signpost patients to appropriate sources of support is currently being developed and will be shared with practices in advance of 1 December.

Thank you for your continued support in ensuring equitable access to health and social care services in Northern Ireland.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely



Leanne Thompson
Head of General Dental and Ophthalmic Services

cc. **Gearoid Cassidy, Director of Primary Care, DoH**
Caroline Lappin, Chief Dental Officer
Michael Donaldson, Head of Dental Services, SPPG
Raymond Curran, Head of Ophthalmic Services, SPPG