

Chief Executive
2 Franklin Street
BELFAST
BT2 8DQ

Tel: 028 9536 3863
Email: FOI.BSO@hscni.net

6th December 2023

BY EMAIL
[REDACTED]

Our Ref: FOI 2071

Dear [REDACTED]

Your request for information was received on 14th December 2023 and was dealt with under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Please be advised that the Business Services Organisation (BSO) has now completed its search for the information you requested in relation to debts pursued for eyecare and dentistry costs.

Please find this information below:

Please could you say how many debts the Department of Health has pursued in 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 relating to health service eye tests and optical vouchers?

Please could you say how many debts the Department of Health has pursued in 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 relating to dental costs?

In terms of claims to exemption/remission from health charges which could not be cleared following our initial checks, the Patient Exemptions Team wrote out to the following number of patients:

2018/19 7,000
2019/20 5,350
2020/21 1,435
2021/22 3,587
2022/23 4,546
2023 to end of Oct 23 2,713



Unfortunately, we are unable to provide a breakdown of the above cases between Ophthalmic and Dental treatment charges. Some cases may include both types of treatments.

How many of these debts have been taken to court?

We have referred 24 cases to the Small Claims Court

For each case that has been taken to court in 2023, could you briefly outline the circumstances, the value of the debt that is being pursued and the service/goods that it relates to?

The circumstances are similar for each case taken to the Small Claims Court. The Patient Exemptions Team select a sample of cases to be checked every month. These cases are initially sent for eligibility checks to the Department for Work and Pensions or the Business Services Authority. Those cases which come back not cleared are then followed up by the Patient Exemptions Team. This follow up involves writing to the patient with details of the treatment (Type of Treatment (i.e. dental or ophthalmic) and date of treatment) and requesting that the patient submits evidence/proof of eligibility or payment of the health charge. Any case taken to court will have been as a result of the patient failing to provide evidence of eligibility or payment of the health charge.

The table below details the amount of money being pursued and the type of treatment:

Ref	Total Amount	Treatment Type
1	£228.50	Ophthalmic
2	£268.00	Ophthalmic
3	£275.50	Ophthalmic
4	£268.00	Ophthalmic
5	£268.00	Ophthalmic
6	£228.50	Ophthalmic
7	£257.20	Ophthalmic
8	£210.93	Ophthalmic
9	£228.50	Ophthalmic
10	£268.00	Ophthalmic
11	£210.93	Ophthalmic
12	£210.93	Ophthalmic
13	£279.13	Ophthalmic
14	£298.73	Ophthalmic

Ref	Total Amount	Treatment Type
1	£273.66	Dental
2	£315.04	Dental
3	£213.31	Dental
4	£255.50	Dental
5	£222.36	Dental
6	£100.62	Dental
7	£217.03	Dental
8	£ 254.90	Dental
9	£269.82	Dental
10	£254.17	Dental

I hope that the information provided assists you. If you are dissatisfied in any way with the handling of your request, you have the right to request a review. You should do this as soon as possible or in any case within two months of the date of issue of this letter, as the BSO, along with all other public authorities are not obliged to accept internal review requests after this period has lapsed.

In the event that you require a review to be undertaken, you can do so by writing to

Information Governance Manager,
2 Franklin Street,
Belfast,
BT2 8DQ


If, following an internal review, carried out by an independent decision-making panel, you remain dissatisfied in any way with the handling of the request, you may make a complaint under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, to the Information Commissioner's Office and ask that they investigate whether the BSO has complied with the terms of the Freedom of Information Act.

You can contact Information Commissioner at:

Website: www.ico.org.uk
Phone: 0303 123 1113
Email: casework@ico.org.uk
Post: Information Commissioner's Office
3rd Floor, 14 Cromac Place
Belfast
BT7 2JB

In most circumstances the Information Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out. However, the Commissioner has the option to investigate the matter at his discretion.

Yours Sincerely,



for Karen Bailey
Chief Executive