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Rapid payments starting for historical abuse claimants

Public Service | Social Development and Employment

A phased roll-out of faster claim payments for survivors of abuse in State care has begun, with the first claimants now receiving offers, Public Service Minister Chris Hipkins and Social Development and Employment Minister Carmel Sepuloni say.

Rapid payments by the Ministry of Social Development are being prioritised for survivors who are seriously ill or unwell, aged over 70, or have waited the longest to get their claims considered.

“Rapid payments recognise the additional stress to abuse survivors from having to wait several years, in many cases, for their claims to be resolved,” Chris Hipkins said.

“Rapid payments are not part of the new, independent redress system – they are being run by existing claims agencies. They are one of several priority steps being taken to improve the Government’s support for abuse survivors while the new system is developed, with close survivor involvement.”

“Developing the new system will take time – it is complex and sensitive work, and it’s important that we get it right. But we also appreciate that survivors want faster action to get their long-standing claims resolved.”

The first set of rapid payments are being made by MSD, which has about 3000 historic claims – more than 90% of all the current historical claims being processed by four government agencies.

“This is an important step which enables survivors to choose whether to go through a rapid payment process, and ensuring survivors can determine the path that works best for them,” Carmel Sepuloni said.

“After testing with a small group of claimants, MSD has offered rapid payments to 21 survivors, with 16 of them choosing this approach so far and some payments made,” Carmel Sepuloni said.

“It’s a small start, but MSD has been working with claimants to make sure they get it right. I expect a lot more offers to be made.

“Some claimants prefer not to share full details of their experiences and find a sense of relief in being offered the option of a rapid payment. Not having to provide details and have their information tested can reduce some of the anxiety claimants experience.

“Others prefer to go through an individualised assessment rather than accept a rapid payment, as is their right,” Carmel Sepuloni said.

Rapid payment amounts will be roughly equivalent to current claims settlements – the difference is that offers will be able to be made more quickly, because MSD won’t be assessing every concern or allegation raised.

“Rapid payments are possible because they do not require detailed individual assessments. Claimants will only have to confirm basic details, and then their files will be reviewed for key points such as their length of time in care and placements in particular programmes.

“Survivors will be able to choose whether to go through a rapid payment process. This will ensure survivors can determine the path that works best for them,” Carmel Sepuloni said.

Whatever claimants choose, agencies will continue to provide an acknowledgement and apology for people’s experiences in care, access to their personal information and records about their time in care, the opportunity to share their experience, and assistance accessing different supports.

The Ministry of Education, which has about 250 historic claims, is also working to phase in rapid payments for those with historic claims relating to residential schools.

The Ministry of Health and Oranga Tamariki do not currently have historic claims queues, so won’t alter their processes but will monitor the situation and look at rapid payments if needed.

The treatment of rapid payments and existing assessment payments under the new, independent redress system will need to be worked out as part of the survivor-led design process that was announced last month.

“While Cabinet has yet to make final decisions, I intend that survivors who have resolved their claims will still be able to seek additional redress under the new system, although any payment already received would be taken into account in any acknowledgement payment made by the new system,” Chris Hipkins said.

The proposed new redress system will provide a single redress point for all survivors of abuse in State and faith-based care. Until this is developed however, individual agencies and faith-based institutions are responsible for settling their own claims and managing payment timeframes.

Rapid payments, an interim listening service and work to improve survivor access to records of their time in care, were all interim measures that the Abuse in Care Royal Commission of Inquiry recommended before the new redress system is established.

“Good progress is being made with the listening service and survivor records work, and on a public apology for survivors of abuse in care. I expect announcements on these will follow in the New Year,” Chris Hipkins said.



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