



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Mary Coughlan, Minister For Social And Family Affairs Confirms 100% Christmas Bonus Payment

Mary Coughlan, TD, Minister for Social and Family Affairs today announced that certain social welfare customers will get a payment equal to double their normal weekly rate in early December.

The Minister secured the agreement of Cabinet this week to ensure timely payment of the bonus, totalling €127.4 million, which will benefit approximately 816,000 recipients and an estimated 386,000 dependents.

"Christmas is one of the most expensive times of the year and the payment of the Christmas bonus, in the first week of December, is a great help in meeting these costs. This will be the fifth year in which this Fianna Fáil led Government has provided a 100% Christmas bonus, a clear indication of our commitment to supporting the most vulnerable people in our society," said Minister Coughlan.

"Christmas may not be most people's central focus at the moment, but it is necessary to make this commitment now to allow for the necessary IT functions to be put in place to ensure that my social welfare customers receive this bonus payment in good time for Christmas," said Minister Coughlan.

The Christmas bonus is paid to certain Social Welfare customers during the first week of December at an equivalent of 100% of their normal weekly payment, subject to a minimum payment of €30. It is paid mainly to people such as social welfare pensioners and long-term unemployed people who rely entirely on their social welfare payments for financial support.

It is also paid to certain participants of FÁS, VTOS, Job Initiative and CE schemes and certain income maintenance schemes operated by the Department of Health and Children. In addition, for the first time, those in receipt of payments under the Rural Social Scheme, which was introduced by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs earlier this year, will also benefit.

Minister Coughlan also reminded social welfare recipients to ensure they receive their winter fuel allowance under the National Fuel Scheme which starts next week - Monday 27th September 2004.

"This scheme will assist householders who are in receipt of long-term social welfare or health board payments and who are unable to provide fully for their own heating needs," Minister Coughlan said.

"A fuel allowance of €9 per week will be paid to approximately 270,000 people with approximately 118,000 of those getting an additional €3.90 smokeless fuel top up. The total cost of providing this fuel subsidy will be over €83m this year," the Minister added.

"Payment will be made automatically to social welfare recipients for 29 weeks. However, I would remind social welfare recipients to check they are receiving the



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payment and if they have any queries on their entitlement to the allowance, they should contact their local Social Welfare office," said Minister Coughlan.

ENDS
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