

FOI 20/21-0222

The response to this FOI request has two parts:

- A. Further Information to clarify the context of 'Funding Amounts for Assistance Animals' in relation to the previous FOI 19/20-1423, the basis upon which this new FOI has been requested.
- B. An update of the amounts in the previous FOI as at October 2020 (where the previous FOI 19/20-1423 was based on May 2020 Scheme data).

A. FURTHER INFORMATION TO CLARIFY CONTEXT of FUNDING AMOUNTS IN PLANS in relation to FOI19/20-1423.

The FOI 19/20-1423 requested information in relation to Scheme funding for support items relating to Assistance Animals (and/or Guide Dogs).

The information was provided as at 31 May 2020.

The support items for which data was requested were:

Maintenance Costs for Assistance Animals
03_900100155_0130_1_1
05_50 12 39 287_30_1_2
or other superseded similar item numbers

Purchase for Assistance Animals
05_123988286_0113_1_2
05_900101111_0130_1_2
or other superseded similar item numbers

The FOI did not include a request for information on the actual payments made for Assistance Animals, and how payments are related to the Funding of Stated Items. Without that context, the information asked for and provided in respect of the "Funded Supports/ Stated Items" in isolation could be misleading and/or taken out of context and misrepresent the functioning of the Scheme.

A.1 Funded Amounts / Stated Items

For a particular participant, if an Assistance Animal is determined to be 'Reasonable and Necessary', the funding amount for the Purchase Cost will be included as a "Funded Item" or "Stated Item" in a participant's plan, as part of the participants' capital budget.

For a particular participant, if an Assistance Animal is determined to be 'Reasonable and Necessary' (either a new Assistance Animal, or an Assistance Animal that a participant already had prior to entering the Scheme), the funding for the Maintenance of the Assistant Animal, may or may not, be included as a "Funded Item" or "Stated Item" in a participant's plan. However, Payments for Assistance Animal Maintenance can be made from a participant's Core Consumables budget or Assistive Technology budget, without the need for an amount to be specified as a Stated/Funded item. Most participant plans do not specify the Maintenance costs for Assistance Animals as a "Stated Item", but rather they flexibly use their Core Consumable and/or AT budgets.

Having an item listed as a "Stated Item" restricts its use in that the funding amount must be spent for that specified support item and there is no 'flexibility' attached to that amount.

If an item is put into a plan as a Funded/Stated Item then the "Funding/Stated Item" remains as part of the description of the plan until the participant's next Plan Review. Even if the participant spends the

funds from their budget on the Funded/Stated Item, the item remains in the Plan description until it is removed during the next Plan Review. If a participant, for whatever reason, could not purchase the Funded/Stated Item during the review period, AND it continues to be assessed as Reasonable and Necessary, then it would be included as a Funded/Stated Item in the next plan. This is because unused funds in plans are not automatically 'rolled over'. This means that in many cases the funding for an Assistance Animal may appear to two or more plans, even though it is in respect of a single approval for one Assistance Animal. For example, this could occur if a participant is waiting for an Assistance Animal to be fully trained and the timing goes over the plan period.

Therefore, the total number of plans with an Assistance Animal as a Stated Item will overstate the actual number of Assistance Animals that have been approved to be funded. The FOI19/20-1423 was based on the number of plans, rather than unique participants, and therefore, the statistics could be misleading in relation to the number of Assistance Animals funded through the Scheme to date.

A.2 Additional Information to understand FOI Requests in full context

Original FOI 19/20-1423 Requests 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

FOI Request 1 stated that "The number of plans with Assistance Animal as a funded item" was 409 plans. FOI Request 2 stated that "The average funding per plan for the above 409 plans was \$45,734. FOI Request 3 gave the distribution of the total number of plans by disability type.

Disability Type	Number of plans	Proportion
Visual Impairment	335	82%
Autism	35	9%
Intellectual Disability	< 11	2%
ABI	< 11	2%
Psychosocial Disability	< 11	2%
Other Disability Type	13	3%
Total	409	100%

FOI Request 4 stated that "The number of plans with Maintenance (for Assistance Animal) as a funded item was 277 plans."

FOI Request 5 stated that "The number of plans with both Assistance Animal and Maintenance Funded within the same plan was 53."

Updated numbers for FOI 19/20-1423 - Request 1, 2, 3 (as at May 2020)

The original number of 409 plans for all plans for all participants who ever had an Assistance Animal listed as a Funded/Stated Item since coming into the Scheme. These amounts include cases where there was funding in two or more plans *in respect of the same participant*. This means that the 409 plans *overstates the actual number of Assistance Animals that have been approved for funding* due to the same Assistance Animal potentially being reflected in more than one plan.

It also included cases where the stated amount for an Assistance Animal is less than \$300. This appears to be a coding error and should have been properly coded as a Stated Amount for Maintenance (not Purchase).

Therefore, the number of **unique** participants (not plans) that ever had an Assistance Animal approved as Reasonable and Necessary was **360 (not 409)** with average **\$46,530** and a distribution into disability types as follows:

Updated FOI 19/20-1423

Disability Type	Number of participants	Proportion
Visual Impairment	316	88%
Autism	<10	3%
Intellectual Disability	<10	2%
ABI	<10	2%
Psychosocial Disability	<10	2%
Other Disability Type	15	4%
Total	360	100%

Updated numbers for FOI 19/20-1423 - Request 4 (as at May 2020)

The number of *unique participants* who have ever had Maintenance as a Stated Item in at least one plan is **224 participants**. The number of unique participants who have a current plan (ie their most recent plan as at May 2020) with Maintenance for Assistance Animals as a Funded/Stated item is **20**.

As noted above, most participants with an Assistance Animal will not have Maintenance as a Stated Item, but rather, will use their Core Consumable funding for Assistance Animal expenses.

B. FOI 20/21-0222 - UPDATE OF FOI 19/20-1423 REQUESTED AMOUNTS TO OCTOBER 2020 (based on month end data at 30 September 2020)

1. The number of **unique participants** who have ever been approved for funding for an Assistance Animal as at 30 September 2020 was **379**. (funding data is updated at each month end).
2. The average funding/payment amount for the above 379 Assistance Animals was **\$44,611**.
3. The 379 split into disability types is as follows:

Total Number of Assistance Animals Funded		30-Sep-20
Disability Type	Number of participants	Proportion
Visual Impairment	330	87%
Autism	10	3%
Intellectual Disability	<10	2%
ABI	<10	2%
Psychosocial Disability	<10	2%
Other Disability Type	16	4%
Total	379	100%

4. The number of **unique participants** who have ever had Assistance Animal Maintenance as a Stated Item in at least one plan is **230 participants** (with a total of **327 plans**). The number of unique participants who have a current plan (ie their most recent plan as at 30 September 2020) with Assistance Animal Maintenance as a Funded/Stated item is **26**.

As noted above, most participants with an Assistance Animal will not have Maintenance as a Stated Item, but rather, will flexibly use their Core Consumable budgets for Assistance Animal expenses.

5. There is no direct relationship between having a Stated Item in a plan for Assistance Animal Purchase and a Stated Item in a plan for Assistance Animal Maintenance.