



MORTGAGE

5. FINANCES

At a time when you may prefer to be concentrating on coping with advanced cancer and spending time with your family and friends, you are confronted by harsh practicalities such as money matters.

Organising your finances is important. Your income, outgoings and general financial and legal status, are likely to be affected by your state of health.

Costs and expenses

If your work is affected, loss of income is likely to be a major financial stress – doubly so if a partner stops or reduces work to care for you.

You may have already confronted other expenses related to cancer, including medications and treatments, the out-of-pocket costs of some services and travel. The progress of your illness may now mean buying or hiring special equipment, paying for household services, modifying your home⁵⁷ or running two households if you relocate for palliative care.⁵⁸

What may help

Travel assistance

A few organisations or schemes can help you with the cost of travelling to see health professionals, including palliative care specialists.

- In NSW for example, the **Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS)** helps people who live more than 100 kilometres from the nearest specialist. Other states have similar schemes. Your doctor or other health care providers should have more information. Also the **Cancer Council Helpline (13 11 20)** will have information about the support in your state.



Equipment assistance

Equipment needed for your care at home can be expensive. There are a number of programs in each state that may help with this cost. See the earlier section on “Trouble getting around?” in Chapter 1 (pg 34) for more information.

Financial assistance

Check with Centrelink whether you qualify for any benefits or pensions such as a sickness allowance, disability support pension, family allowance or a carer’s allowance. You may also be eligible for a health care card, which can reduce the cost of your medications or a pension travel card, which can reduce the cost of public transport. Call **13 27 17** or go to www.centrelink.gov.au



Q&A

Q: Given the progression of my cancer, can I use my superannuation now?

A: Under recent changes to Federal legislation, you may be allowed to draw on your superannuation if your illness is considered terminal. To be eligible, you must provide statements from two medical practitioners (at least one being a specialist) certifying that you have a life expectancy of 12 months or less. Contact your superannuation fund to discuss this with them.

For more information



- The **Cancer Council Helpline (13 11 20)** can provide you with general information and perhaps put you in touch with some financial assistance services.
- The Cancer Council has a Welfare Grants Program that, in cases of extreme hardship, can provide financial help to people with cancer. Contact the Cancer Council in your state.
- Financial counselling is also available from some charity organisations, such as the Salvation Army or St Vincent de Paul Society.

Paying the bills

Unfortunately bills do not have any respect for your state of health. They keep rolling in and the last thing you want is essential services being cut off because you have not been able to pay them.

What may help

Organise back-up

If you are normally responsible for paying the household bills, brief your partner, a family member or a trusted friend on how to take over from you. Don’t just assume these duties will be picked up by someone else in the household and if you live alone, it’s very important that you organise the back-up support.

Check your accounts

Set up your accounts so that whoever is going to be paying your bills has access to them. Someone you have briefed and trust will need to be able to make or authorise payments on your behalf.

Talk to service providers

Some utilities will deal only with the person who set up the account when it comes to connecting, disconnecting or querying services so inform those service providers that authority has been passed on to someone else.

Also some organisations such as electricity and phone companies are prepared to discuss difficulties in paying bills (a number is usually listed on mailed accounts) and it is better to contact them sooner rather than later.



• Keep non-PBS (Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme) medicine receipts for tax purposes. Ask the Tax Office or your accountant about the safety-net level over which you can claim out-of-pocket medical expenses as deductions. You can also go to www.pbs.gov.au/html/consumer/home for more information about the PBS.

Caregiver benefits

Finances are also likely to be an issue for those who care for you. Travel, loss of income and various out-of-pocket expenses can add up. Any financial assistance they receive will not only take some pressure off them, but will also ease some of the concerns you may have about the sacrifices those around you are making.

What may help

Government benefits

Government payments available through Centrelink include:

- A non-means-tested allowance for anyone caring for an adult with a condition who needs care and attention.
- A means-tested payment for people who provide constant care in the home of a person with a severe disability or medical condition.
- The Carer Adjustment Payment for families in which a child aged up to six is diagnosed with a severe illness, medical condition or a major disability.
- The Employment Preparation Service to help caregivers who have been out of the workforce for two years or more return to work.

For information on any of these payments, go to www.centrelink.gov.au or phone 13 27 17.

Personal Notes