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Universal Credit and NHS Costs

Some claimants receiving Universal Credit will be exempt from NHS costs in the same way that claimants on income-based Jobseekers Allowance, Income Support and income-based ESA have been but it will not be automatic and many will not be exempt.

Prescriptions and dental treatment will automatically be free for people

* aged 60 or over
* under 16
* 16 to 18 and in full time education.

For those on Universal Credit to qualify, their earnings during their most recent assessment period must be:

* £435 or less
* £935 or less if their UC includes an element for either a child or limited capability for work

**Patients who meet this criteria must tick the ‘income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance’ box on the patient declaration until the prescription form is updated.**

The form for dental treatment has already been updated to include UC, but if the claimant’s dental practice is not yet using the updated version patients who meet the UC conditions should tick the 'income-based Jobseeker's Allowance' box until then.

Penalty charges

Patients who mistakenly claim exemption when they are not in fact exempt may receive a Penalty Charge Notice and fined up to £100 with a surcharge of £50 if it is not paid within 28 days. Advisers can help their clients challenge these penalties where the client was in fact entitled to claim free prescriptions or free or reduced dental charges but, for example, was waiting for a benefit award; challenges can also be made where the client believes they have an exceptional reason not to pay and can show that they did not act wrongfully or with any lack of care. Misadvice by a doctor or pharmacy staff will not usually be sufficient to show this.

Help for patients who don’t qualify

Patients who aren’t entitled to free prescriptions or dental treatment through their UC may qualify for help through the [NHS Low Income Scheme](https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/nhs-low-income-scheme), and anyone who regularly pays prescription charges may be able to reduce the cost with a [prescription prepayment certificate](https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/ppc).

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