Housing Rights

https://www.housingrights.org.uk/housing-advice/help-pay-housing-costs/changes-your-circumstances

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Changes in your circumstances

This information is for people living in Northern Ireland.

Sometimes your circumstances might change.

If you are claiming Universal Credit or Housing Benefit, it is important you tell them.

Things that might change include:

- you start working
- you claim a new benefit
- your income changes. For example, your employer asks you to work more sometimes
- your landlord changes your rent
- people move in or out of your house

There can be other changes you also need to report. If you are not sure, it is better to report a change.

You can sign into your Universal Credit account and report a change to let them know.

For Housing Benefit, you can let the Housing Executive know.

Your benefit amount might change. Universal Credit or Housing Benefit will tell you if this happens.

If you don't report your change in circumstances, you might:

- get less benefit than you should

- need to pay back money
- be prosecuted for fraud

Universal Credit and paying for two homes

Normally, Universal Credit will only pay for one home. There are some limited exceptions to this.

You can get Universal Credit for two homes if you:

- have a large family, and your social landlord gave has given you two homes to live in, or
- left your home for certain reasons

Universal Credit and moving house

If you are moving house and are claiming Universal Credit:

- in most cases, Universal Credit will only pay for one home at a time
- this includes when you are moving house and might need to pay for two homes at the same time
- there are limited exceptions to this rule

One exception would be if the new property needs to be adapted for a disability, and this is delaying the move. Universal Credit might pay for both homes for one month if this applies.

Universal Credit if you are unable to stay in your home

You might have had to leave your home. Universal Credit might still pay in certain circumstances. For example, if you:

- left due to risk of abuse or violence in your home. You may be able to get Universal Credit for up to 12 months for two homes.
- left because your home is was being repaired
- are in custody for six months or less

- leave Northern Ireland for more than one month (there are some exceptions to this rule)
- are absent from your home for certain reasons for up to six months

Get advice if these circumstances apply to you.

Universal Credit and being outside Northern Ireland

Universal Credit will stop if you leave Northern Ireland for more than one month, unless:

- a close relative has passed away, and you have had to leave Northern Ireland because of this. It needs to be unreasonable for you to return to Northern Ireland within one month. You might be able to get Universal Credit for a second month if this applies.
- you or a close relative are getting medical treatment. You might be able to continue to receive Universal Credit for six months.
- if you have to work overseas for certain jobs, such as in the armed forces. You might be able to receive Universal Credit for six months.

Housing Benefit and domestic abuse

You may be able to get Housing Benefit for two homes for up to 52 weeks if you:

- left your main home because of domestic abuse, and
- are paying rent on another property, but you still need to pay rent on your home, and
- intend to return to your home

Housing Benefit and moving house

Sometimes, if you are moving house, Housing Benefit might pay for two homes at the same time. They can do this if:

- you become responsible for paying rent on two properties at the same time, and
- this couldn't be avoided

An example of when this might happen is if you get a social housing offer. However, your private landlord needed four weeks' notice for you to leave.

This means there might be four weeks where you have to pay rent for two properties. Housing Benefit might pay for both in these circumstances.

Get advice if you are in a similar situation.

Housing Benefit and being unable to live in your home

You may be able to get Housing Benefit for up to 52 weeks if you live in Northern Ireland but not in your home because you:

- were admitted to hospital
- are getting medical treatment
- are afraid to return home
- are on remand or in a bail hostel
- had a dependent getting medical treatment
- are in residential accommodation, and plan to return home

Sometimes Housing Benefit can pay for up to 13 weeks when you are not living in your home. You need to be in Northern Ireland but not living in your home because you're:

- on holiday
- in custody for up to 13 weeks
- staying in residential accommodation on a trial basis

Housing Benefit and being outside of Northern Ireland

Normally, you can get Housing Benefit for up to four weeks if you go outside Northern Ireland. Your absence must be temporary.

In some cases, this can be extended to eight weeks. This applies if:

- a close relative has passed away, and
- their absence is because of this, and

- it would be unreasonable for the person to return home within the first four weeks

You might be able to get Housing Benefit for up to 26 weeks and be outside Northern Ireland. This applies only in limited cases. For example:

- you are overseas because you are a member of the armed forces
- you are absent because you fear violence in your home
- you are in hospital
- you are getting medical care in other accommodation
- your partner or child is getting medical treatment or care
- you are a mariner or continental shelf worker

More advice

- Claiming Universal Credit
- Housing Benefit
- Deductions from your benefits