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| **Here Is Your Update:** News for Community Representatives ♦ **WINTER EDITION** ♦ |
| **June 2015** |

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### Tenure Review

The last tenure review of community representatives was completed in December 2007. It is now timely to consider options regarding a tenure review so a report is being prepared to advise the Minister. We will keep you updated of progress.

### Budget 2015

You will have heard about the Government’s $800 million package for children in material hardship in its Budget 2015 released on 21 May 2015. Here’s a link to the Beehive [website](http://beehive.govt.nz/portfolio/budget-2015)

The key components of the package are:

* Benefit rates for families with dependent children will increase by $25 a week after tax, resulting in an average gain of $23 per week in the hand after adjustments to other financial support such as Accommodation Supplement and Temporary Additional Support.
* Low- to middle-income working families (not on a benefit) will get up to $12.50 a week more from Working for Families, depending on their income.
* Very low-income working families (receiving the minimum family tax credit) will get $24.50 more a week from Working for Families, approximately matching the increase in benefit rates.
* Low-income families will be eligible for a higher $5 rate of Childcare Assistance for pre-school and out-of-school care.
* Beneficiaries receiving Sole Parent Support will need to reapply for their benefit every year.
* Student Allowance rates for families with children will increase by $25 a week.
* Sole parents, and partners of beneficiaries, will be expected to look for part-time work when their youngest child turns three, rather than five as now.
* Part-time work will be defined as work averaging 20 hours a week, rather than 15 hours per week as currently, but flexibility will be retained.

These changes won’t take effect until 1 April 2016 and until then our clients’ payments and obligations won’t be affected. Changes to Childcare Assistance will take effect from 4 April 2016.

Attached are all of the Factsheets that we have so far.

<http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/index.html>

### Community Representative Appointments

Southern has recently appointed two Community Representatives. We welcome Shona Brown and Kathrine Mclean to the role.

**Hearings by Video Conference**

There are a variety of reasons why a client may not be able to physically attend a hearing. One option for a client in this situation is to have the hearing via video conference. There are now 30 sites across the country that have facilities for video conferences. Contact your regional BRC co-ordinators for more information.

**BRC recommendations**

Sometimes a Benefits Review Committee will not only decide the outcome of a review of decision but they may make a recommendation to the Ministry as well. For example, if a review was about the amount granted for Disability Allowance, the panel may make a recommendation that the Ministry test the applicant’s eligibility for Temporary Additional Support (TAS).

If the BRC makes a recommendation; the co-ordinator is responsible for ensuring that the Ministry considers the recommendation, the HIYA record is updated with the outcome of that consideration and the client is advised.

The co-ordinator and panel member information packs have been updated to include this information.

## BRC panel reminder

Please remember that if you are on a BRC panel, when you write up the findings, that all the discussions and deliberations need to be included. This is particularly important when debt recovery is involved. Even if the panel decides the 86(9A) criteria has not been met, and therefore the debt is recoverable, the panel needs to show that it has gone through each part of the criteria and the findings need to include why the panel believes the criteria has not been met.

**Hearing adjournments**

Please bear in mind the principles of natural justice when considering if all parties have been provided sufficient time to respond to a request for further information.

Sometimes, one or more of the parties involved in a Benefits Review Committee hearing, will seek an adjournment to provide additional information that has been sought by the Committee. To ensure a timely resolution, please set an agreed, fair timeframe for the parties to respond.

**Map modernisation**

Map(Manuals and Procedures) is the definitive source of information on MSD policy, rates/thresholds and legislation.

Map has been upgraded to a new platform in April 2015. The old platform was not supported which means that if it breaks or there are any issues with it, it can’t easily be fixed. The opportunity was also taken to make some improvements to how staff navigate around Map.

Note that the policies or procedures that are contained within Map have not changed. The changes are in relation to how Map looks and works.

The Review and Client Representative Team took the opportunity to revamp our pages on the Ministry intranet. The new look Review and Client Representative Team pages went live on 1 May 2015.

**Realignment**

The Ministry is realigning itself to a client-centred, connected one MSD. To this effect, three “pillars” with the same functions have been created – Centralised Services, Contact Centre Services, Regional Service Delivery (frontline services) – to operate across Senior Services, Studylink, Work and Income, and parts of Integrity Services.

Information on what the pillars look like is attached.

# Feedback

The RCR Team welcomes any feedback from you. The team’s contact details are below.

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