

PRESS RELEASE

July 2020

Report to the Flemish Parliament

Care budget for elderly people with a care need

The Court of Audit's investigation into the care budget for elderly people with a care need showed that the processing time of applications is evolving favourably, but delays are still occurring. The current income survey when calculating the care budget may lead to people in need of care with a limited income being all the same not eligible for an allowance. The income limits applied are not substantiated.

Introduction

For elderly people with a care need who have a low income, the care budget is an important contribution to finance the additional costs they have due to reduced self-reliance. The Court of Audit examined whether the applications are handled within the decree term and in a uniform manner, and whether elderly people in need of care with a low income do indeed receive an allowance. In 2020, the total budget for elderly people with a care need amounted to 370.7 million euros.

Applying for a care budget

The person in need of care must himself apply for the care budget from the care fund to which he is affiliated. This can only be done electronically via the web application e-ZBO of the Flemish Social Protection Agency. The care fund makes a decision about the care budget based on, among other things, the income of the person in need of care and his partner's, and the reduced self-reliance, which is measured on the basis of a medical-social scale. The central application forwards a proposal of basic entitlement to the care fund, which can decide on it positively or negatively.

The care fund has to process the application within six months. The Court of Audit's analysis showed that in 2017 the care funds made a late decision on 34% of the applications. In 2018 43% of all decisions were late, in 2019 20% were late and in 2020 10%. The care funds have unanimously stated the processing time of the medical grading as an important reason for the term being exceeded. The analysis showed that in 2017 48% of the requested medical gradings took longer than four months decree term. In 2018 this was still the case for 18%, in 2019 for 16% and in 2020 for 12%. Although these numbers show a favourable evolution, there are still significant delays to be observed. In order to remedy delays in medical grading, the Flemish government is planning to introduce BelRAI, a tool that maps out a person's physical, social and psychological functioning. However, introduction of this tool may still take some time. In addition, the agency has started a pilot project in which medical grading is done by the social work services of the health insurance funds. A second, albeit less important, cause of delay is the gathering of information from third parties or the person in need of care.

Target group reach

The target group of elderly people in need of care with a low income, may not always be reached. There is a risk of non-take-up because the person in need of care may not be sufficiently aware that he is entitled to an allowance or may not know that he can request a medical reclassification in the event of an increasingly reduced self-reliance. Thanks to the web application, the file processing of applications for a care budget is almost the same in all provinces and only the medical classification shows slight differences.

Regulations for income surveys also put a strain on the target group reach. Income limits to the care budget are not substantiated anywhere. If the person in need of care sells a property, 6% of the sales value is added to his annual income for ten years. The coalition agreement and the 2019-2024 policy memorandum provide for a revision of the charging of movable assets and real-estate in the income survey. This has not happened to date.

Response of the minister

In his response, the Minister of Welfare, Public Health and Family indicated what actions he has already taken to meet the report's recommendations and what Flemish Government's further intentions are in that regard.

Information for the press

The Court of Audit exerts an external control on the financial operations of the Federal State, the Communities, the Regions and the provinces. It contributes to improving public governance by transmitting to the parliamentary assemblies, to the managers and to the audited services any useful and reliable information resulting from a contradictory examination. As a collateral body of the Parliament, the Court performs its missions independently of the authorities it controls.

The audit report on the *Care budget for elderly people with a care need* has been sent to the Flemish Parliament. The full version and this press release can be found on the Court's website: www.courtofaudit.be.