

Seafarers Hospital Society

Criteria for awarding grants

The aim of the Society's grants service

The Seafarers Hospital Society is a long-established maritime charity dedicated to meeting the health, welfare and advice needs of seafarers. The health and welfare grants we provide to seafarers and their dependants are meant to facilitate this aim in its broadest sense and, therefore, cover a variety of both physical items, from disability aids and equipment, to essential household goods, as well as other unexpected or urgent expenses.

Each applicant is different, and each individual has unique circumstances, therefore each application is considered individually. There are a huge number of things that will impact on an individual's need for help and support, and so the Society has few set rules, rather observing a number of criteria when reviewing each application. These are set out below:

Service at sea

Merchant Navy or fisherman should have served for a minimum of 7 years, and evidence of this service will be required. Shorter service will be considered if the seafarer has been invalidated out of service, or is active but currently unable to work for whatever reason and intends to return.

Income versus expenditure

The Society will not normally query or comment on how an individual spends their income except in exceptional circumstances where we think a mistake may have been made on the form and the expenditure on any item appears unreasonable.

The Society will review the difference between the income and expenditure of the applicant. If an individual has very little spare/net income, this will usually strengthen the application, however it also depends on the cost of the item requested. For example, replacing a boiler or buying an EPV often costs several thousands of pounds, and even those applicants with some savings or a relatively high net income would not be able to afford these items - they are often required urgently and cannot be saved up for.

It may be recommended that case workers consider referring applicants to SAIL to ensure they can maximise their benefits.

Savings

Savings do not generally exclude anyone from applying for a grant. It depends on the level of savings and what the application is for. For example, often older applicants are saving up for their funeral and so we would take this into account when deciding if they can afford the item applied for or not. Normally we work to the current Social Care savings thresholds.

Debts

The Society can help with priority debts such as rent and mortgage arrears, or council tax and utility arrears. It cannot help with other private loans or credit card debts. Caseworkers should always refer the applicant to SAIL as they can help with debt rescheduling. The Society may pay for debt relief orders where recommended by SAIL/CAB.

Funeral Grants

The Society will help with up to a maximum of £750 towards funeral costs if the applicant has a modest income and even if they have some savings. If applicable, the applicant must apply to the DWP first for a grant towards the cost of the funeral. The Society will help the seafarer with the financial costs of a dependent family member. In other cases, the Society will usually only help the widow/widower/partner of the seafarer, or the seafarer's children to pay the cost of the seafarer's funeral. The Society cannot help, for example, the widow of a seafarer with the costs of a non-dependent child's funeral, or family members with the subsequent funeral of the seafarer's partner/widow.

Things the Society will help with

As stated above, the Society will support a wide range of applications, including white goods, EPVs/electric wheelchairs, boiler and electricity refurbishments/replacements, furniture and decorating, clothes and urgent living expenses, and in some cases the cost of obtaining an MCA medical certificate.

Urgent living expenses

These are usually for seafarers who are doing just about OK, but either sickness, bad weather or injury etc knocks them off track for a short while. These can be difficult for the Society to support as there may be less direct evidence as to what the payment will be for, such as an invoice for an EPV or a statement of rent arrears, however they are often equally critical.

Bearing in mind that each case is different, we will rely on the caseworker's knowledge and understanding of both the applicant and their individual situation to propose a weekly amount based on the individual's needs. Commonly this could be a mix of rent, council tax and utilities where there is evidence, but could include food, travel, support for children (such as school transport costs); or, where an individual is homeless, funds to cover telephone, food or travel. As long as there is a clear statement, and evidence where available, from the caseworker of what the grant funds will be spent on, we will consider the application.

Other exceptional needs

Some unusual requests have been for transport and a B&B for an applicant to visit his mother in a care home some distance away; the annual fee for a care alarm in an applicant's home; caravan rent to enable a widowed mother to take her 3 children on a basic holiday; coal for the winter; renovation of a specialist caravan which was the applicant's home. We will consider most things as long as they are reasonable and are required.

Multiple applications

The Society would expect the caseworker to approach other relevant charities when requesting a substantial grant (e.g. over £500). There are a number of charities that support seafarers, depending on whether they were in the forces (even for a short time or were in the Merchant Navy in areas of conflict) or their specific working role, e.g. as an engineer or a chef. Many of these charities have their own criteria but it is always worth spreading the net as widely as possible.

Reviewing applications is never simple and if you are unsure then please ring us on **020 8858 3696** or email admin@seahospital.org.uk to discuss your case.