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Deputy David Johnson, Chair
Economic and International Affairs Scrutiny Panel
BY EMAIL

25 March 2022

Dear Chair

Economic and International Affairs Scrutiny Panel Seasonal Workers and the Rural Economy Review

Thank you for your enquiry about seasonal workers' access to Health and Community Services' (HCS) provided services.

The HCS *Residents and non-residents charging policy*, which is brought forward by myself as the Minister for Health and Social Services, sets out the criteria for free access to HCS provided care and treatment. The purpose of the policy is to provide for appropriate, fair and reasonable access to free healthcare thus safeguarding public money, whilst deterring healthcare tourism ie, people travelling to Jersey with the sole or express intent of accessing free care and treatment.

The policy currently sets out that any person can access free emergency treatment in the General Hospital's Emergency Department but that free non-emergency care is only available to certain categories of people based on their residential and working status. This does not preclude people who do not qualify for free non-emergency care from receiving that care but they will be required to pay for it.

The policy currently provides that a worker, who is ordinarily resident and who has been in paid regular employment in Jersey for a full six-month continuous period immediately prior to seeking treatment, can access free non-emergency care. The policy does not, however, factor in any previous periods of residency ie, the six-month qualifying period must be the six months immediately prior to accessing care.

This means a seasonal worker, who is working in Jersey for nine months, would be eligible for free care after they completed six months' continuous residency but, if they leave for three months and then return, the clock resets and they would have to start again in terms of gaining their six-month qualifying period.

I recognise that, following Brexit, Jersey businesses are increasingly using nine-month work permits to fill seasonal jobs particularly in agriculture and hospitality. I am also aware that, in a market in which Jersey businesses are having to compete against other jurisdictions for seasonal labour, concerns have been expressed about returning workers being required to repeat the six-month qualification period. This seems particularly hard on those returning workers who are showing their commitment to the Island by coming back to live and work in Jersey and pay their tax and social security.

I have therefore decided that revised rules should be brought forward that recognise and welcome these workers' contribution to the Island. The existing policy will be amended to provide that **returning workers** may access free health care on their return to the Island if they had lived and worked in Jersey for at least six months continuously during the three years immediately prior to the date of the required treatment – ie, there will be no requirement to complete a further qualification period. They will, however, need to be able to show that they have returned to Jersey for the purposes of work.

If the returning worker completed the six-month qualifying period more than three years ago, they would not be entitled to free care until they have completed a new six-month qualifying period. Seasonal workers are not able to bring their dependants to Jersey so this concession would not extend to others.

The operational mechanics that underpin this change need to be in place before I can formally announce a commencement date. I have, however, instructed officers to resolve this as soon as possible and I hope to be able update the Panel in the very near future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R. J. Renouf', with a horizontal line underneath.

Deputy Richard Renouf
Minister for Health and Social Services