

Benefits for sick or disabled children and their families

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In Finland sick or disabled children and their families can receive many different social security benefits. First of all there is disability allowance for children under 16 years of age which Tuula Tuominen already mentioned in her message. It is one of the disability benefits based on the Disability Benefit Act (570/2007) and is administered by The Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela). It can be paid to children under 16 years of age if they have an illness or injury that creates a need for care and rehabilitation that lasts at least 6 months and imposes particular strain and requires a greater commitment than the care of non-disabled children of the same age. Disability allowance for children under 16 is not awarded solely on the basis of financial hardship.

The amount of the allowance is divided into three different rates. The rate of the allowance depends on the degree of strain and commitment required from the family. The amount of the allowance is not conditional on the earnings or wealth of the child or his parents. The basic allowance is 85.59 euro per month in 2010 and it is paid if the strain and commitment is weekly. An increased rate, 199.71 euro per month, is paid if the strain and commitment is daily and the daily care of the child is demanding and time-consuming. The third, highest rate is 387.26 euro per month and it is for children who need around-the-clock care. The rates of disability allowance are index-linked and the allowance is free from tax.

Disability allowance for children under 16 years is meant for persons with disabilities or long-term illnesses. It was paid to 34,450 persons in 2009.

Children with severe disabilities whom Kela has awarded disability allowance at the middle or the highest rate are also entitled to medical rehabilitation services for persons with severe disabilities. The rehabilitation can take such forms as individual therapy or group rehabilitation or adaptation training. After the child has reached the age of 16 years, he may be entitled to a disability allowance for persons aged 16 years or over and rehabilitation allowance.

When a parent is temporarily prevented from working in order to take part in treatment or rehabilitation arranged for his child he may receive special care allowance. Special care allowance is also administered by Kela. To qualify for the special care allowance, the recipient has to be a student, employed or self-employed or be looking after his child while receiving child home care allowance. The principal qualifying condition is that the recipient, on account of participating in the treatment or rehabilitation, cannot carry out his or her regular work and is not paid during the leave of absence. In addition the recipient must:

- I. participate in the hospital or outpatient treatment or rehabilitation of his child, who is under 7 years of age,
- II. participate in the hospital or outpatient treatment or rehabilitation of his child, who is between 7 and 15 years of age and severely ill
- III. or look after his child, who is under 16 and severely ill, at home as part of a hospital or outpatient treatment plan.

The special care allowance can also be paid to a person who participates in the treatment or rehabilitation of an adopted child, a foster child or the child of his spouse or partner.

The amount of special care allowance is normally calculated on the basis of the person's taxed earnings. The amount of the special care allowance is usually about 70% of salary. There is a minimum rate to which a person is entitled regardless of his income. In 2010 the minimum allowance is 22.04 per day. Allowance is paid only for weekdays. Usually the special care allowance cannot be paid for more than 60 weekdays on grounds of the same sickness. However, the maximum period of 60 days can be extended with 30 weekdays if, according to the attending physician, there is a specific medical reason. After 90 days the allowance can be paid only for a cogent medical reason.

In addition to the benefits mentioned above, the local authorities may pay informal care allowance for family members caring for a sick or disabled child. Informal care allowance is mainly a form of home care allowance for the elderly, but it can also be granted when a child needs care and assistance due to diminished functional capacity, illness, disability or some comparable reason. The informal care allowance for family carers is based on the Informal Care Act (937/2005), but there is no subjective right to allowance guaranteed to everybody. Instead, the organizing of the benefit is based on the resources of the municipality. The municipality decides in which extent the informal care allowance will be paid and on what grounds the allowance will be granted. However, some minimum conditions are enacted in the law.

Informal care allowance is granted by the municipality on the basis of a service contract that is drawn between the municipality and the family caregiver. An individual care plan that specifies the services and the service provider and must be agreed upon by the carer and the municipality is an essential part of the contract. Informal care allowance includes fee payable to the caregiver, services for the care recipient and services for the caregiver. The rate of the fee depends on the required time and extent of the assistance, and varies greatly in different municipalities. No income testing is required for the allowance. According to law, in 2010 the minimum fee payable to the caregiver is 341.41 euro per month or 694.83 euro per month during a hard transitional stage when the caregiver has to temporarily stop working or studying. In 2009 there were 4.779 children under 18 years of age who received informal care allowance.

Some local authorities may also pay supplement to home care subsidy for parents who take care of their severely ill or disabled child at home. Home care subsidy is paid to parents who take care of their child under 3 years of age at home instead of taking him to the day care.

It has been suggested that the administration of informal care allowance should be transferred from the local authorities to Kela. This way there would be national standards concerning informal care assistance and the qualifying conditions and the application procedure would be more consistent throughout the country. In regard to possible reforms of legislation, no other significant amendments are being prepared concerning benefits for sick or disabled children.

According to Employment Contracts Act, when the employee's child under 10 years of age falls suddenly ill the employee is entitled to temporary child-care leave for a maximum of four working days at a time in order to arrange for care of his child or to care for the child personally. Some employees are eligible for pay during the period of the temporary child-care leave on the grounds of collective labour agreements.

More information in English about the benefits administered by Kela:

<http://www.kela.fi/in/internet/english.nsf/NET/180708140511HS?OpenDocument>