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## **‘Proof of life’ certificates required for overseas pensioners**

One of the stranger pieces of legislation to be introduced into Parliament last month is an attempt to ensure that overseas welfare recipients over the age of 80 are in fact, alive.

There are approximately 96,000 people permanently living overseas who currently receive an Australian social security payment. The majority of these receive the age pension. At present, the system relies on a relative to advise Services Australia that the recipient of the payment has passed away for payments to cease. Government data suggests that, “there is a disparity in the death rate of pensioners aged 80 years and above overseas, compared to pensioners in Australia.” So, either living overseas is good for your health and people are living longer than Australian norms suggest, or deaths are simply not being reported. The Government is betting on the latter.

Amendments introduced into Parliament would require welfare recipients aged 80 years and over, who have been absent from Australia for at least two years, and receiving certain social security payments, to give a ‘proof of life’ certificate at least once every two years when the Department requests one. Proof of life certificates are a common practice in many European countries. If the proof of life certificate is not forthcoming within 13 weeks of being requested, payments will be stopped 26 weeks after the date of notice. If there is an error and the certificate is provided late, payments will resume and arrears paid.

Proof of life certificates will need to be verified by an authorised third party, such as a judge or magistrate, a medical doctor, or authorised consular staff at an Australian embassy, consulate or high commission.

The amendments apply to the Age Pension, Carer Payment, Disability Support Pension, Widow B Pension, or Wife Pension, where the recipients have been continuously absent from Australia throughout the previous 2 years.

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