

Retirement Income – Account based pensions

Account based pensions may provide tax-effective, regular income to help meet your income needs using your superannuation savings.

Please note that if you're starting a 'transition to retirement' pension and haven't met a full condition of release, different rules apply to these pensions. You should refer to the 'Transition to retirement' Understanding Series for more information.

Benefits

- Pension income you receive is tax-free if you are aged 60 or over (and paid from a taxed super fund).
- Some of the pension income may be taxable if you are under age 60. You may be entitled to a 15% tax offset on the taxable portion of your pension payments in some circumstances.
- You will be required to receive a minimum amount from your pension each year, which is based on your age.
- You retain flexibility by continuing to have a wide range of investment options and the ability to stop the pension at any time.
- You can nominate eligible beneficiaries to receive the remaining benefits upon your death.

How it works

An account based pension is an income stream paid from a superannuation fund. To commence an account-based pension, you first need to meet a full condition of release or already have unrestricted non-preserved funds in your superannuation account. Full conditions of release include circumstances such as meeting the retirement definition for super purposes, attaining age 65, and certain situations where you're classified as permanently disabled.

Account based pensions may be tax-effective because:

- Pension income paid to you from age 60 is not taxable (from a taxed fund).
- Taxable pension income paid to you between preservation age and age 60 or due to permanent disability is eligible for a 15% tax offset.
- Within the pension account, all earnings and capital gains from investments are tax exempt. This can boost the effective returns compared to other similar investments you may own personally.

Your pension account balance will increase and decrease over time due to factors such as positive or negative market movements, pension payments, fees and charges. These factors ultimately determine how long your account based pension will last.

Pension transfer balance cap

The total amount of superannuation money that you can transfer to a tax-free superannuation income streams is subject to a lifetime cap. In 2017/18 the cap is \$1.6 million (and may be indexed in future years). This would include amounts transferred to account based pensions. Superannuation savings in excess of the cap can be retained in your accumulation accounts where tax at the concessional rate of up to 15% on earnings continues to apply.

Important: This document contains general information about the benefits, costs and risks associated with certain product classes and strategies. It has been prepared without taking into account your objectives, financial situation or needs. Because of this you should, before acting on any advice in this document, consider whether it is appropriate to your personal circumstances.

Pensions assessed under the transfer balance cap rules include:

- Pensions you have commenced after you have met a full condition of release
- Death benefit pensions of which you're a recipient
- Defined benefit income streams (such as those paid from Government super funds), and
- Certain other types of income streams.

If you're receiving a transition to retirement pension, there are also circumstances where this type of pension will commence to be assessed under these rules.

An excess transfer balance occurs if the total value of amounts to your transfer balance account exceeds your transfer balance cap. This would exist for example, if the cap was \$1.6 million and you commenced a pension with \$1.8 million. In this case, you would receive a credit for \$1.8 million, and would have a \$200,000 excess transfer balance amount.

In the case of an excess, it will be necessary to:

- reduce the amount held in pension phase (e.g. a partial commutation) and
- pay excess transfer balance tax.

Please refer to the 'Transfer Balance Cap' Understanding Series for further information.

Pension income

An account based pension is very flexible, allowing you to vary the amount of income you take. One of the few requirements is that you must take at least a minimum amount of income each year. There is no maximum and additional lump sums can be withdrawn at any time.

When you commence your pension it is calculated based on your age at that time, and your account balance. The minimum pension amount is then recalculated every 1 July based on your age and account balance at that time.

Your age on 1 July	Minimum for 2017/18
Under 65	4%
65 to 74	5%
75 to 79	6%
80 to 84	7%
85 to 89	9%
90 to 94	11%
95 or older	14%

Taxation of your pension payments

Your account based pension may be made up of a taxable and a tax-free component. Generally contributions where a tax deduction has been claimed, including employer contributions and amounts you have salary sacrificed, and any investment returns earned by your fund form part of the taxable component. Other amounts, such as after tax non-concessional contributions and spouse contributions,, will make up your tax-free component.

When you commence an account based pension the tax components of the pension will reflect the tax components of your super account just before you commenced the pension, in the same proportions.

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All future pension payments, or any lump sum commutations you take from your pension, are split in the same proportions. For example, if your account balance at commencement consisted of \$80,000 taxable and \$20,000 tax-free, then 80% of all pension payments and lump sum withdrawals would also be from the taxable component.

Whilst you are under age 60 (but have reached your preservation age), pension payments from the taxable component are included in your assessable income with a 15% tax offset to help reduce your tax. Once you turn age 60, all pension income is tax free (from a taxed fund).

Department of Human Services

Account based pensions are assessed under the deeming rules for the social security income test for income support payments such as Age Pension, Service Pension, Disability Support Pension, and Carers Payment. This assessment also applies for some other payments and allowances. This means the assessable income from your pension account is calculated using an assumed rate of earnings, known as a deeming rate (set by the government). The actual pension payments you receive may be more or less than the deeming rate.

However, if you commenced your account based pension before 1 January 2015 and have been continuously receiving an 'income support payment' from the Department of Human Services or Veterans' Affairs (DVA) since 31 December 2014, the assessable income from your account based pension may continue to be calculated under the 'deductible amount' rules. These rules may be more favourable as only a portion of the pension payment (above the calculated 'deductible amount') is assessed. If you switch to a new pension provider or your Department of Human Services/DVA entitlements reduce to nil for any period, your account based pension will revert to deeming rules.

Regardless of when your account based pension commenced, lump sums withdrawn do not themselves count as income for Department of Human Services/DVA purposes. However if your account based pension income is determined under the 'deductible rules' lump sum withdrawals may impact the pension's deductible amount going forward.

The account balance of an account based pension is assessed as an assessable asset.

Risks and Consequences

- If you have made personal superannuation contributions for which you wish to claim a tax deduction, you must lodge a Notice of Intent form with your superannuation fund (and wait for confirmation that they have received the notice) prior to commencing an account based pension or rolling your funds to another provider to commence an account based pension.
- In the financial year that you either start or stop your account based pension the minimum pension required for that financial year is pro-rated to reflect the number of days in the financial year that your pension was or will be running. If the pension is commenced in June, there is no mandated minimum pension payment in that financial year.
- If you do not take the required minimum income, tax will apply on earnings of the account for the whole year.
- Your account based pension is not guaranteed and pension payments can only be made while there are funds in your account. There is a risk that your pension income may cease (or reduce) if you draw your income too fast or if investment returns are poor.

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- Upon death, any remaining account balance will be paid to any valid beneficiary you have nominated, or to your estate. If you haven't made a valid beneficiary nomination, the trustee of your super fund will decide to whom to pay the benefit.
- If you are a Department of Human Services/DVA customer, you are required to notify the Department of Human Services/DVA within 14 days about any changes to your situation, including the commencement or cessation of an account based pension, significant changes in the account balance, or any lump sum withdrawals you make from your pension as it may affect your payment.
- If you have an existing account-based pension which is assessed by the Department of Human Services/DVA under the 'deductible amount' rules, switching to a new account-based pension will trigger a shift to deeming rules. In some circumstances this may be less favourable under the income test and can affect your Department of Human Services/DVA entitlements as well as aged care fees (if applicable).
- If you transfer an amount in excess of your available transfer balance cap to an account based pension, it will be necessary to commute (reduce) your pension by the amount of the excess, as well as associated earnings on the excess amount. You will be liable for excess transfer balance tax. If you don't provide this instruction, the ATO will direct your pension provider to take the necessary steps.
- You should check the details in the fee section of your Statement of Advice and the Product Disclosure Statement (PDS) for your superannuation fund.

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