

COVID-19 AND CENTRELINK

Last updated 24 March 2020

This factsheet provides information on what Centrelink can do if you have been affected by COVID-19. New measures for the Coronavirus supplement will begin on 27 April 2020.

This factsheet covers:

- Before 27 April 2020
 - Economic Support Payment for Centrelink recipients
 - Mutual Obligations
 - Payments if you don't currently get Centrelink
 - Asset Hardship Provisions
- After 27 April 2020
 - Payments if you currently get Centrelink
 - Mutual Obligations
 - Payments if you don't currently get Centrelink



If you need help with any of these issues you can contact your local member centre for free legal advice. Find your local member centre at <http://ejaustralia.org.au/legal-help-centrelink/>

Note: From 20 March 2020 some Centrelink **payment names** changed as they moved to the JobSeeker payment. These include Newstart Allowance and Sickness Allowance.

For more information, see <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/jobseeker-payment>

Before 27 April 2020

Economic Support Payment for Centrelink recipients



If you receive a Centrelink payment and you were living in Australia on 12 March, you will automatically get two \$750 one-off Economic Support Payments.

The first payments will start on 31 March, and most people will receive it by 17 April. The second payment will start on 13 July.

To ensure you receive this payment, make sure Centrelink has your correct details by checking myGov or calling the relevant [Centrelink contact line](#).

If you are a Cashless Debit Card or Income Management participant, the payment will be quarantined to your respective card.

For more information and a full list of eligible Centrelink payments, see <https://www.dss.gov.au/about-the-department/covid-19-information-and-support>

Mutual Obligations exemption



If you are receiving a Centrelink payment that requires you to complete mutual obligations and you're affected by COVID-19, Centrelink may grant you a Major Personal Crisis exemption for a period of 14 days.

This will mean you will not have to complete your **mutual obligations**, including:

- attending appointments
- looking for work
- doing any of the activities in your Job Plan.

You can apply for a Major Personal Crisis exemptions by calling Centrelink on your regular payment line and telling them why you are isolated. Reasons can include:

- a doctor or government authority has told you to isolate yourself because of possible exposure to coronavirus
- you need to isolate yourself after reading the [latest health alerts](#) from the Department of Health

You will not need to provide a medical certificate.

If you are a **principal carer**, you may also claim this exemption if:

- your child's school or childcare centre has closed, or
- you're caring for an adult with a disability or special needs whose day service or supported workplace premises has closed

If you are a **student**, you may be taken to have a reasonable excuse for not meeting study activity if you are unable to attend studies due to COVID-19.

If you are not affected by COVID-19, you are still required to complete your mutual obligations. You are able to negotiate alternative job-seeking activities with your provider, including completing activities and appointments online.

If you are experiencing issues with your provider, you can call the Department's National Customer Service Line on 1800 805 260.

If you are a participant in the **Community Development Program**, you will not be required to attend face-to-face appointments, activities in group settings such as Work for the Dole. You will not receive a financial penalty or any other compliance action for failing to engage in your CDP mutual obligations. These arrangements apply while the biosecurity arrangements announced by the government on 20 March 2020 continue.

Payments if you don't currently get Centrelink



If you are:

- not receiving a Centrelink payment, and
- temporary unable to work because you have been diagnosed with COVID-19, and
- you have work to return to

you may be eligible for JobSeeker Payment or Youth Allowance for jobseekers, depending on your age.

If you don't meet the income and assets test for these payments, you may qualify for asset hardship provisions (see below).

JobSeeker Payment

If you are **over 22** and are unable to attend work because you have been diagnosed with COVID-19, you may be eligible for the JobSeeker Payment.

Once you are granted JobSeeker Payment, you can apply for an incapacity exemption from mutual obligations. This will mean you won't be required to complete mutual obligation activities during your period of illness.

To claim JobSeeker Payment call the Job Seekers line on 132 850.

Youth Allowance for jobseekers

If you are **under 22** and are unable to attend work because you have been diagnosed with COVID-19, you may be eligible for Youth Allowance for jobseekers.

To claim Youth Allowance for jobseekers, call the Job Seekers (Youth Allowance) line on 132 490.



If you are having issues with your payment or your claim is rejected, you have the right to appeal.

It is a good idea to lodge the appeal within **13 weeks** of the decision so you can receive full back payment if you are successful.

You can contact your local member centre for free advice on appealing. Your local member centre can be found at <https://ejaustralia.org.au/legal-help-centrelink/>.

Asset Hardship Provisions



If you are:

- unable to access a payment due to your assets, or your payment is reduced, and
- you are experiencing severe financial hardship

you may still be able to get a payment or increase your rate of payment through the asset hardship provisions. These provisions mean that Centrelink may disregard some of your assets when calculating your payment rate.

You may be eligible for asset hardship provisions if:

- your total income is less than the full rate of the payment you are applying for
- the funds you can access fall below a certain limit, and
- there's nothing else you can reasonably do to improve your financial position.

To apply for asset hardship provisions, you need to complete a Claim for consideration under hardship provisions form. Call the Financial Information Service line on 132 300 for a copy of the form.

For more information, visit <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/topics/asset-hardship-provisions/27496>

Where can I get help?



You can get free legal advice from your closest member centre which can be found at <http://ejaustralia.org.au/legal-help-centrelink/>

After 27 April 2020

Payments if you currently get Centrelink

Coronavirus supplement



If you receive an eligible Centrelink payment, you will automatically be paid an extra \$550 a fortnight for the next 6 months. Eligible payments include:

- Jobseeker Payment
- Youth Allowance Jobseeker
- Youth Allowance Student
- Austudy
- Abstudy
- Parenting Payment
- Farm Household Allowance
- Special Benefit recipients

Economic Support Payments



If you receive a Centrelink payment and you were living in Australia on 12 March, you will automatically get two \$750 one-off Economic Support Payments.

The first payments will start on 31 March, and most people will receive it by 17 April. The second payment will start on 13 July.

To ensure you receive this payment, make sure Centrelink has your correct details by checking myGov or calling the relevant [Centrelink contact line](#).

If you are a Cashless Debit Card or Income Management participant, the payment will be quarantined to your respective card.

For more information and a full list of eligible Centrelink payments, see <https://www.dss.gov.au/about-the-department/covid-19-information-and-support>

Mutual Obligations exemption



If you are receiving a Centrelink payment that requires you to complete mutual obligations and you're affected by COVID-19, Centrelink may grant you a Major Personal Crisis exemption for a period of 14 days.

This will mean you will not have to complete your **mutual obligations**, including:

- attending appointments
- looking for work
- doing any of the activities in your Job Plan.

You can apply for a Major Personal Crisis exemptions by calling Centrelink on your regular payment line and telling them why you are isolated. Reasons can include:

- a doctor or government authority has told you to isolate yourself because of possible exposure to coronavirus
- you need to isolate yourself after reading the [latest health alerts](#) from the Department of Health

You will not need to provide a medical certificate.

If you are a **principal carer**, you may also claim this exemption if:

- your child's school or childcare centre has closed, or
- you're caring for an adult with a disability or special needs whose day service or supported workplace premises has closed

If you are a **student**, you may be taken to have a reasonable excuse for not meeting study activity if you are unable to attend studies due to COVID-19.

If you are a **sole trader** that has become eligible for Jobseeker Payment, you will automatically meet your mutual obligation requirements during this period by continuing to develop and sustain your business.

If you are not affected by COVID-19, you are still required to complete your mutual obligations. You are able to negotiate alternative job-seeking activities with your provider, including completing activities and appointments online.

If you are experiencing issues with your provider, you can call the Department's National Customer Service Line on 1800 805 260.

If you are a participant in the **Community Development Program**, you will not be required to attend face-to-face appointments, activities in group settings such as Work for the Dole. You will not receive a financial penalty or any other compliance action for failing to engage in your CDP mutual obligations. These arrangements apply while the biosecurity arrangements announced by the government on 20 March 2020 continue.

Payments if you don't currently get Centrelink



If you:

- are stood down or lose your employment as a permanent employee, or
- lose income as a sole trader, self-employed person, casual worker or contract worker, or
- lose income due to being required to care for someone who is affected by COVID-19

you may be able to access Jobseeker Payment or Youth Allowance Jobseeker.

You will be required to meet the income tests for these payments. However, your assets will not be taken into account for the period of the Coronavirus supplement.

If you are unable to engage in mutual obligations due to being diagnosed with COVID-19, once you are granted JobSeeker Payment you can apply for an incapacity exemption from mutual obligations. This will mean you won't be required to complete mutual obligation activities during your period of illness.



Waiting Periods

If you are eligible, you will be able to access the payment straight away.

You will not have to serve the one week Ordinary Waiting Period, Liquid Asset test Waiting Period or Seasonal Work Preclusion Period. If you are already serving one of these waiting periods, it will be waived.

The Newly Arrived Residents Waiting Period (NARWP) will be temporarily waived. When the Coronavirus supplement ceases in September 2020, you will be required to serve any remaining NARWP. However, the time you were receiving the Coronavirus supplement will count towards your NARWP.

Income Maintenance Periods and Compensation Preclusion periods will continue to apply, as payments under these arrangements are treated as income.

You cannot access annual leave, sick leave or Income Protection Insurance at the same time as receiving Jobseeker Payment and Youth Allowance Jobseeker.

If you are accessing employer entitlements such as annual leave or sick leave, or Income Protection Insurance, you must tell Centrelink.

If you do not declare your income fully to Centrelink or inform Centrelink honestly about your circumstances, you may receive a debt in the future and/or be liable to prosecution.

Applying for payments

To claim JobSeeker Payment call the Job Seekers line on 132 850.

To claim Youth Allowance for jobseekers, call the Job Seekers (Youth Allowance) line on 132 490.

If you do not already deal with Services Australia, you should:



- set up your myGov account
- call Services Australia to verify your identity (from April 2020), and
- get a link to your Centrelink online account

When you are applying for Jobseeker Payment and Youth Allowance Jobseeker, you will be required to:

- make an initial declaration about your identity, residency status and income
- if you are a worker, make a declaration that you have been made redundant or had your hours reduced (including to zero) as a result of the economic downturn due to COVID-19
- if you are a sole trader, make a declaration that your business has been suspended or had turnover reduced significantly

If you pay rent, you should also declare the amount you pay to qualify for Rent Assistance.

A number of previous requirements for claiming the payments will be removed temporarily, including the requirements for:

- Employment Separation Certificates, proof of rental arrangements and verification of relationship status
- Job Seeker Classification Instrument assessment for those people who have recently left jobs and are therefore job ready
- Making an appointment with an employment service provider before you can be paid



If you are having issues with your payment or your claim is rejected, you have the right to appeal.

It is a good idea to lodge the appeal within **13 weeks** of the decision so you can receive full back payment if you are successful.

You can contact your local member centre for free advice on appealing. Your local member centre can be found at <https://ejaustralia.org.au/legal-help-centrelink/>.

Where can I get help?



You can get free legal advice from your closest member centre which can be found at <http://ejaustralia.org.au/legal-help-centrelink/>.

This factsheet does not constitute legal advice.

Please contact any of our member centres if you wish to obtain free legal advice.
Find your closest member centre at www.ejaustralia.org.au