

COVID-19 AND CENTRELINK

Last updated 19 March 2020

This factsheet provides information on what Centrelink can do if you have been affected by COVID-19.

This factsheet covers:

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



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** will be changing as they move to the JobSeeker payment. These include Newstart Allowance and Sickness Allowance. **The current payment amounts will not change.**

This factsheet is drafted in anticipation of the changeover to JobSeeker Payment and uses the new payment names.

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

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 the \$750 one-off Economic Support Payment.

The payments will start on 31 March, and most people will receive them by 17 April.

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.

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

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/>

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