



# CENTRELINK AND CORONAVIRUS: A GUIDE TO YOUR RIGHTS

FACT SHEET

This guide provides information on your Centrelink rights and what Centrelink can do if you have been affected by Coronavirus.

If you need help with any of these issues you can contact us on 1800 812 953 for free advice from one of our specialist lawyers.

**Note:** Centrelink payment names have recently changed. Newstart Allowance and Sickness Allowance is now called “Jobseeker Payment”.

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## If you are currently receiving Centrelink payments

### One-off payment of \$750

If you receive a Centrelink payment and you were living in Australia on 12 March 2020, you will automatically get a one-off \$750 payment.

You should receive this payment by 17 April 2020. Some people will get it earlier.

You don't need to do anything to get this payment, but it is a good idea to check that Centrelink has your correct bank account details and your correct contact details.

If you use a Cashless Debit Card or if you are on Income Management, your payment will go on your card.

You are eligible for a one-off \$750 payment if you get one of the following Centrelink payments:

- Age Pension
- Disability Support Pension
- Carer Payment
- Parenting Payment
- Wife Pension
- Widow B Pension
- ABSTUDY (Living Allowance)
- Austudy
- Bereavement Allowance
- Newstart Allowance
- JobSeeker Payment
- Youth Allowance
- Partner Allowance
- Sickness Allowance
- Special Benefit
- Widow Allowance
- Family Tax Benefit Part A
- Family Tax Benefit Part B
- Double Orphan Pension
- Carer Allowance
- Pensioner Concession Card holders
- Commonwealth Seniors Health Card holders
- Veteran Service Pension
- Veteran Income Support Supplement
- Veteran Compensation payments, including lump sum payments
- War Widow Pension
- Veteran Payment
- DVA PCC holders
- DVA Education Scheme recipients
- Disability Pensioners at the temporary special rate
- DVA Income support pensioners at \$0 rate
- Veteran Gold Card holders
- Farm Household Allowance

Some people will receive an additional payment of \$750 in July 2020. There is additional eligibility criteria to receive this payment. One of these criteria is that you did not receive the fortnightly coronavirus supplement between April and July 2020.

## Fortnightly Coronavirus supplement

If you are currently receiving a payment listed below, you will get an extra \$550 each fortnight, on top of your normal payment.

This is called the “coronavirus supplement”. It will be paid from 27 April 2020.

You are eligible for this extra payment if you receive:

- JobSeeker Payment (previously called Newstart Allowance)
- Youth Allowance
- Sickness Allowance
- ABSTUDY (Living Allowance)
- Austudy

- Parenting Payment
- Partner Allowance
- Widow Allowance
- Farm Household Allowance
- Special Benefit

You don't need to do anything to get this payment, but you should make sure Centrelink has your correct bank details and your correct contact details.

## Mutual Obligations

“Mutual obligations” are the rules that require people to look for work or do certain activities to receive Centrelink payment each fortnight.

You have mutual obligations if you receive:

- JobSeeker Payment
- Youth Allowance as a job seeker
- Parenting Payment (single - after your youngest child turns 6)
- Special Benefit paid under certain conditions

## Temporary suspension of mutual obligations

All mutual obligations have been suspended until **Monday 27 April 2020**. This means that you will not have to complete your mutual obligations, including:

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

This is only until 27 April 2020. After this time, you will need to follow the mutual obligation rules.

## Mutual obligations after 27 April 2020

Because of the Coronavirus, you have the right to ask for changes to your job search activities. These can include:

- Having meetings with your job service provider over the phone or online
- Completing online activities such as online training, creating job plans, writing a CV and preparing job applications online

You can ask for these changes by [calling Centrelink](#) or using MyGov.

Job Plans will automatically be adjusted so people only have to search for 4 jobs each month. This is because of the impact of Coronavirus on the job market.

If you can't complete your mutual obligations because of Coronavirus, you should ask Centrelink for an exemption.

## Exemption for people affected by Coronavirus

If you are affected by Coronavirus and cannot comply with mutual obligations, you can apply to Centrelink for an exemption. This is called a "Major Personal Crisis exemption" and it lasts for 14 days.

You can apply for a Major Personal Crisis exemption by [calling Centrelink](#) and telling them how you have been affected by Coronavirus. 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

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

- your child's school or childcare centre has closed
- you are caring for an adult with disability 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 classes due to Coronavirus.

You do not need to provide a medical certificate to support your claim.

You can ask for these changes by calling Centrelink on 132 850 or using MyGov.

If you need advice about your Centrelink rights, you can call DCLS on 1800 812 953. We offer free, confidential legal advice with specialist Centrelink lawyers.

## If you don't receive a Centrelink payment but you need it because of Coronavirus

There are new rules in place which make it easier to get payment from Centrelink because of the Coronavirus.

If you have lost your job, been stood down or if you are self-employed or a casual worker who has lost income because of Coronavirus, you may be eligible for JobSeeker payment or Youth Allowance.

### Am I eligible for payment?

To be eligible for JobSeeker payment or Youth Allowance, you need to meet the [Centrelink income test](#). This is a test that looks at whether you are receiving any income, and whether your partner is receiving any income.

Centrelink considers these things to be income:

- Wages
- Profit
- Some regular payments received as a gift or allowance
- Interest from investments
- Rent paid to you
- Royalties
- Some compensation payments

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) payments do not count as income.

To be eligible for Centrelink payments, your partner must earn less than \$79,762 per year.

Usually people who apply for Centrelink payments have to meet an asset test as well, but this test is suspended because of Coronavirus.

### Employer subsidies and leave

You cannot receive the JobSeeker Payment or Youth Allowance if your employer is paying you the JobKeeper subsidy announced on 30 March 2020.

If your employer offers you this subsidy and you have already applied for JobSeeker Payment, you can withdraw your JobSeeker application. You should get legal advice before doing this.

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

## How do I apply?

If you think you are eligible, you can apply for payment straight away by calling Centrelink on 132 850 or using your MyGov account to apply.

If you don't have one, you can [set up a MyGov account](#) if you have access to a Smartphone or a computer.

**Note:** If you don't have documents with you or if you can't get through to Centrelink, you can go online and register "an intention to claim". This is a way of telling Centrelink that you want to claim Jobseeker Payment in the future. If you register your intention to claim, your payment can be backdated to the date you registered.

When you apply, Centrelink will ask you to provide information about:

- your identity and residency status
- your income
- the income of your partner
- whether you have been made redundant or had your hours reduced (including to zero) as a result of Coronavirus
- if you are a sole trader, whether your business has been suspended or had turnover reduced
- whether you pay rent and how much you pay

The new Coronavirus rules mean that you don't need a Separation Certificate from your employer.

**Note:** It is important to make sure you tell Centrelink the right information. If you make a mistake, you might end up with a Centrelink debt.

## What if my application is unsuccessful?

If you get a letter or phone call telling you that your claim wasn't successful, you have a right to appeal the decision.

You can appeal the decision by calling Centrelink on 132 850 or using MyGov. If you call Centrelink, you should tell them that you want their decision reviewed by an "Authorised Review Officer".

An Authorised Review Officer is a senior Centrelink employee who will review the decision afresh.

You should appeal the decision **within 13 weeks**. This will mean that if your appeal is successful, you can receive back-pay from the time you made your application.

## Need help?

Darwin Community Legal Service has specialist Centrelink lawyers who can offer you free legal advice and help. Call us on 1800 812 953 or go to our website at [www.dcls.org.au](http://www.dcls.org.au)