

*This factsheet is part of a series from Legal Aid NSW that aims to help answer your questions about COVID-19 and everyday law.*

**You may be worried or confused about how COVID-19 will affect you and your everyday life. Sometimes a crisis can make legal problems worse or new problems might develop. Legal Aid NSW understands that there will be a lot of questions about money worries, fines, police, housing, Centrelink, employment, guardianship and mental health. This series of fact sheets will give you helpful information and contacts to assist you to manage all the changes that are happening in our community.**

## Centrelink and COVID-19

In response to COVID-19 the Australian Government has made changes to support individuals and families who have lost work or income.

The changes mean that some people will be able to access Centrelink payments who were not able to before. Centrelink have made it quicker for people who have lost work or income to access some payments.

This factsheet will give you information about the changes.

## How do I claim a Centrelink payment?

If you are currently not getting money from Centrelink, you can check if you could get a payment by using Centrelink's [Payment and Service Finder](#).

The best way to claim a payment is online using MyGov.

If you cannot claim online, you should call Centrelink to discuss the best way to claim.

## What is the Coronavirus Supplement?

Some people who get Centrelink will also get a Coronavirus Supplement. You do not need to apply for this supplement. You will get it if you are eligible. To be eligible you must be on:

- JobSeeker Payment
- Youth Allowance
- Abstudy
- Austudy
- Parenting Payment
- Partner Allowance
- Widow Allowance
- Farm Household Allowance
- Special Benefit

The Coronavirus Supplement is paid at the following rates:

- \$550 per fortnight from 27 April 2020 to 24 September 2020;
- \$250 per fortnight from 25 September 2020 to 31 December 2020; and
- \$150 per fortnight from 1 January 2021 to 31 March 2021.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The proposed extension from 1 January 2021 to 31 March 2021 is still subject to the passage of legislation

### What is the Economic Support Payment?

Most Centrelink recipients would have received a one-off \$750 Economic Support Payment in late March or early April 2020.

Centrelink recipients who were not eligible for the Coronavirus Supplement would also have received a second \$750 Economic Support Payment in mid-July.

Two more Economic Support Payments of \$250 each will be paid in December 2020 and March 2021 to you if you have one of the following payments or cards:

- Age Pension
- Carer Allowance
- Carer Payment
- Commonwealth Seniors Health Card
- Disability Support Pension
- Double Orphan Pension
- Family Tax Benefit
- Pensioner Concession Card

To be eligible for the December 2020 payment, you must have one of the above payments or cards on 27 November 2020.

To be eligible for the March 2021 payment, you must have one of the above payments or cards on 26 February 2021.

### What happens if I am a permanent visa holder?

If you are a permanent resident who is currently serving a Newly Arrived Residents Waiting Period, the waiting period has been removed from 25 March 2020 to 31 March 2021 for the following payment types:

- Austudy
- Farm Household Allowance
- JobSeeker Payment
- Parenting Payment
- Special Benefit
- Youth Allowance

If you claim one of the above payments, any time spent on the payment will still count towards serving your Newly Arrived Residents Waiting Period.

### What special measures have been introduced for Jobseekers?

#### Temporary waiver of the assets test

Centrelink waived the assets test for JobSeeker Payment, Youth Allowance and Parenting Payment for 6 months from 25 March 2020 to 25 September 2020.

If you get one of these payment types, you will have been asked to update Centrelink with your asset details before 25 September 2020.

If you have not given your asset details and Centrelink has stopped your payment, you will need to call Centrelink and provide the details so your payments can continue.

If you have given your asset details and your payment has now stopped, it may be because your assets are over the assets test limit for that payment. You can check the asset test limit for your payment type on the Centrelink website.

### Increased income free area

From 25 September 2020, the income free area increased from:

- \$106 per fortnight to \$300 per fortnight for JobSeeker Payment; and
- \$143 per fortnight to \$300 per fortnight for Youth Allowance for job seekers.

This means you can earn up to \$300 per fortnight without it impacting on your Centrelink payment. For each dollar you earn over \$300, your payment will reduce by 60 cents.

### Increased income cut-off limit for partner income

If you have a partner who does not get a Centrelink pension, the income cut-off limit for partnered JobSeekers has been increased from \$1,858.50 per fortnight to \$3,086.11 per fortnight.

From 25 September 2020, your JobSeeker payment will reduce by 27 cents for every dollar your partner earns over \$1,165 per fortnight.

### Temporary waiver of the Ordinary Waiting Period, Liquid Assets Waiting Period and Seasonal Work Waiting Period

The one-week Ordinary Waiting Period which applies if you claim JobSeeker Payment, Parenting Payment or Youth Allowance for JobSeekers has been waived from 12 March 2020.

The Seasonal Work Preclusion Period has been waived from 25 March 2020.

The Liquid Assets Waiting Period was initially waived from 25 March 2020, but now has been reintroduced for new claims lodged on or after 25 September 2020.

Income Maintenance Periods continue to apply with no changes, so it is important that you disclose any leave payments you have received or will be receiving when you are making your claim.

### Mutual obligation requirements

Mutual obligation requirements for jobseekers were temporarily suspended from 25 March 2020. They were reinstated on 28 September 2020.

Activity requirements include attending scheduled phone or online appointments with your employment service provider, applying for up to 8 jobs a month and accepting 'suitable' job offers. Your individual mutual obligations are listed in your Job Plan or Participation Plan.

If you do not meet these requirements, Centrelink might suspend your payment until you re-engage. Continued failure to meet the requirements can lead to financial penalties including suspension of your payment for up to 4 weeks.

If you cannot meet these requirements, for example because you are required to self-isolate, or are experiencing illness, domestic violence or a family crisis, you can seek a temporary exemption.

### What if I owe a Centrelink debt?

Centrelink has temporarily suspended some debt raising and recovery action from 3 April 2020 to 1 February 2021. This suspension does not apply to debt connected with serious non-compliance or fraud.

If you have a current debt repayment arrangement in place with Centrelink and you cannot continue to afford to make your repayments, you can contact Centrelink on 1800 076 072 to renegotiate the arrangement or ask that the payment arrangement be put on hold temporarily.

### How do I appeal a Centrelink decision I am not happy with?

If you do not agree with a decision made by Centrelink, you have the right to appeal. You could do this if your claim is rejected.

You can appeal a decision to a Centrelink Authorised Review Officer. You can ask for a review over the phone, or online by completing the [Review of Decision Form](#).

You should do this within 13 weeks of the decision.

### Where can I find more information?

- 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.
- For legal advice from Welfare Rights Centre call 9211 5300 or 1800 226 028
- [Centrelink COVID-19 page](#)
- [Department of Social Services COVID-19 page](#)

### How can I get help?

For free legal help call 1300 888 529 or [call your local Legal Aid NSW office](#).

If you need an interpreter, call the Translating and Interpreting Service on 131 450 and ask for LawAccess NSW. If you find it hard to hear or speak, call the National Relay Service on 133 677 and ask for LawAccess NSW or visit [www.relayservice.gov.au](http://www.relayservice.gov.au).

This factsheet is intended as a general guide to the law. Do not rely on this information as legal advice. We recommend you talk to a lawyer about your situation. This information is correct at the time of writing, however, it may change.