

WINE NEWS

Coronavirus: Am I eligible for Centrelink's Jobseeker payment and does my partner's income affect it?

By Nicole Mills

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PHOTO: Authorities are urging people not to line up at Centrelink offices. (ABC News: Andrew O'Connor)

Due to coronavirus, the Government has expanded the Jobseeker and Youth Allowance for jobseekers criteria meaning more people are now eligible.

From April 27, you'll be eligible if you're:

- A permanent employee who has been stood down or sacked
- A sole trader, self-employed, casual worker or contract worker who now earns less than \$1,075 a fortnight as a result of the economic downturn
- You're caring for someone who has COVID-19

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The Jobseeker and Youth Allowance payments are tapered, meaning if you earn \$0 for the fortnight you'll get the full welfare payment, but if you still have some income (but remain below the income threshold) you will receive a portion of the payment.

But even if you're only eligible for a tiny Jobseeker or Youth Allowance payment, you will receive the full \$550 a fortnight Coronavirus Supplement.

It is an additional top-up payment for people on welfare, which effectively doubles the full Jobseeker (formerly known as Newstart) allowance.

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The Government initially announced people receiving the following payments would automatically get the supplement:

- JobSeeker Payment
- Youth Allowance for job seekers
- Parenting Payment
- Farm Household Allowance
- Special Benefit

But later added these payments to the list:

- Youth Allowance for students
- Austudy for students
- ABSTUDY for students

The Coronavirus Supplement will be automatically added to your welfare payment for six months from April 27.

Who gets the \$750 Economic Support Payments?

There's a long list of people who will receive the \$750 Economic Support Payment, which includes carers, parents and veterans.

You don't need to apply for this payment; it will automatically be paid to eligible recipients.

Eligible recipients include anyone already receiving Centrelink payments and those new to Centrelink who apply by April 13.

Those who aren't eligible for the Coronavirus Supplement, such as disability or age pensioners, may also get a second Economic Support Payment to be paid around July.

So, if you already receive Centrelink — please stop calling

Services Australia general manager Hank Jongen said existing customers had contributed to some of the "unprecedented" demand.

"Current customers who have been concerned about when they receive the first stimulus payment have actually been also clogging up our queues and our phone lines," he said.

"It's important for current customers to understand this process is automatic.

"If you are eligible ... you will automatically receive the first \$750 stimulus payment. The payments will be made from March 31 through to April 17. You don't need to contact us. It's automatic."

If my partner still has a job, am I eligible for Centrelink?

We've received a lot of questions on this one.

As it currently stands, if you lose your job and your partner earns more than \$1,850 a fortnight (\$48,100 a year) you will not be eligible for the Jobseeker Payment.

However, things are changing rapidly and there are calls for this to be increased.

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On Tuesday morning, Social Services Minister Anne Ruston spoke to reporters at Parliament House about partner income.

She said Parliament had now passed laws which included giving her, as minister, the power to change things like eligibility criteria as the coronavirus situation evolved.

Here's more of what she said:

"Once you get to [a household income of], I think it's \$48,100 or thereabouts, is currently when it [your eligibility for Jobseeker] will cut out," she said.

"The powers that were granted to me ... will enable me to make changes to that.

"It's certainly something that I'm working on at the moment, to look at a broad range of scenarios as we work through the impacts on the various situations that people find themselves in."

Finance Minister Mathias Cormann also flagged the Government was looking at whether the partner income test should change.

"We are considering what further changes would be appropriate to be made to the partner income test," he said.



PHOTO: If your partner has kept their job during the coronavirus pandemic, it will affect your Centrelink application. (Facebook: Anna)

What about my assets?

Centrelink will now waive asset testing, except for those on the Farm Household Allowance and Special Benefit payments.

But income testing will still apply.

And you cannot access Centrelink payments at the same time as receiving annual leave, sick leave or income protection insurance.

How do I contact Centrelink?

The message from Centrelink is clear: do not go into service centres in person unless you absolutely have to.

The best option for everyone's health and safety is to do everything online, or over the phone.

They have even changed the rules so you can now:

- Prove your identity over the phone (this was previously the main reason new applicants were forced to attend service centres in person)
- Lodge an intent to claim online through MyGov

There have been many reports of the website not working at all, people being kept on hold on the phone for hours only to be disconnected and other frustrating experiences as the system buckles under pressure.

But Mr Jongen said the agency was trying to adapt quickly.

"Only a matter of hours ago, we released a new intent to claim capability online," he said.

"You don't need to queue, you don't need to ring us, you can now lodge your intent to claim through MyGov."

Mr Jongen said many first-time Centrelink applicants would already have a MyGov account if they lodge their tax returns online or deal with Medicare.

"If you have a MyGov account you simply log in and you will see a button that says 'Have you been affected by coronavirus? Do you wish to claim a payment?'" he said.

"You click on that and it will register your intent to claim with us, and we will then contact you to steer you through the process."

Will payments be backdated?

All payments will be backdated to the time you register your intent to claim.

And anyone registering their intent to claim now will be backdated to Monday.

"We've recognised that some people have been trying for two days to get through, so it is backdated to Monday," Mr Jongen said.

Topics: health, diseases-and-disorders, covid-19, government-and-politics, federal-government, community-and-society, welfare, australia

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