

Has coronavirus landed you at Centrelink for the first time? Here's how to apply for the Jobseeker Payment (formerly Newstart)

By [Nicole Mills](#)

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Space to play or pause, M to mute, left and right arrows to seek, up and down arrows for volume.

VIDEO: [Australians have been told to hold off accessing Centrelink unless necessary, to help ease demand.](#) (ABC News)

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If you've lost your job, been stood down or suddenly find your business without customers due to the coronavirus pandemic, you might be tackling Centrelink for the first time, or the first time in a long time.

And you're not the only one.

On Monday, [so many people tried to access the Centrelink website at once that it mimicked a cyber attack](#), triggering alarms and causing the website to crash.

Centrelink is not known for being easy to navigate at the best of times.

In this climate — facing increased demand, just days after a long-planned change saw the Newstart Allowance become the Jobseeker Payment, and as staff rush to implement new coronavirus stimulus packages — [it's going to be harder than ever.](#)

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So the first thing to know is the process probably won't be easy and it will likely get frustrating.

And there may be some kinks and hiccups (or major malfunctions) in the system along the way.

But here's some guidance that may help reduce the stress a little bit.

How to apply for Jobseeker Payment (formerly Newstart Allowance)

Don't ring the hotline, don't go into a service centre, try to do as much as you can online.

Click on the links in this step-by-step guide for more information.

Step one:

Go online and [log in to your existing MyGov account or create a new one](#).

Step two:

Create a Centrelink account.

If you've ever received Centrelink payments in the past, including as a young person or while studying, you may already have one. If so, jump to step three.

If you don't have an online Centrelink account, but you've received payments in the past, try to track down any old concession cards, letters or emails from Centrelink to find your Customer Reference Number (CRN) or Customer Access Number (CAN).

If you can't find this information, you can [call Centrelink and they'll ask you some questions to get your CRN](#).

And yes, we know, that's easier said than done. You may be on hold for a long time.

If you've never received money from Centrelink, you'll need to set up an account for the first time.

This *normally* involves proving your identity by [showing three original documents to prove your identity to Centrelink](#) (they do not accept certified copies).

This is *usually* done in person at a service centre, but **importantly that has now changed**.

Social Services Minister Anne Ruston said on Tuesday **you can now ring up Centrelink and identify yourself over the phone.**

"You are no longer required to attend a Centrelink site to provide proof of identity," Ms Ruston said.

"We'll take your word for it, understanding these are exceptional circumstances.

"We don't want people attending Centrelink sites in person."

Centrelink staff will then give you a validation over the phone, meaning you can go online and register through MyGov without the need to provide proof of identity documents in person.



PHOTO: The website has been struggling to cope with the sudden surge in demand. (ABC News: Nic MacBean)

Step three:

Log in to your MyGov account and **'link' it to your Centrelink account.** Once this is done, you'll be able to log into the MyGov portal and click through to your Centrelink account.

Step four:

If you're still working but there's a reduction in your hours, **you'll need a letter from your employer confirming this.**

In the past when someone lost their job, they needed to [fill in an employment separation certificate](#) for every employer they'd worked for in the past 12 months — but this requirement will be waived from April 27.

You will need to upload other documents throughout the claims process, but we're not going to tell you which ones because everyone's circumstances are different.

You'll find out which ones you need as you complete your claim.

But from April 27, Centrelink will also waive the requirement to provide proof of rental arrangements or verification of relationship status.

[Coronavirus questions answered](#)



Breaking down the latest news and research to understand how the world is living through an epidemic, this is the ABC's Coronacast.

Step five:

It's time to make a claim.

If you're super organised, now is the time to get out that important documents folder you keep in the study and smugly pat yourself on the back.

Or, if you're a normal person, mentally prepare to spend the next few hours digging through drawers searching for paperwork.

Log in to MyGov and go to **Centrelink**.

Select **Payments and Claims** from the menu, then **Claims**, then **Make a claim**.

Choose the category that best describes your circumstance and click **Get started**.

You'll have to submit any **required documents** online now, but you'll have 14 days to submit any **supplementary documents**.

Step six:

As part of the claim, you'll need to book a phone appointment. Some people have reported problems with the website at this point (among others).

You'll need to make a note of your appointment time and make sure your phone is with you.

They'll call from a private number. Answer it!

Step seven:

Wait. Centrelink will let you know if your claim has been approved.

If it is, they'll tell you when you need to report.

This may come through your MyGov inbox or the Express Plus Centrelink app (if you've downloaded it) or by post.

Reporting just means letting Centrelink know how much money you earned over the past 14 days and confirming you've stuck to the mutual obligations laid out in your job plan (more on this in the next section).

You'll have to report every two weeks.

If you don't report, you won't get paid. If you're late reporting, your payment will be late.

You can report online or over the phone.

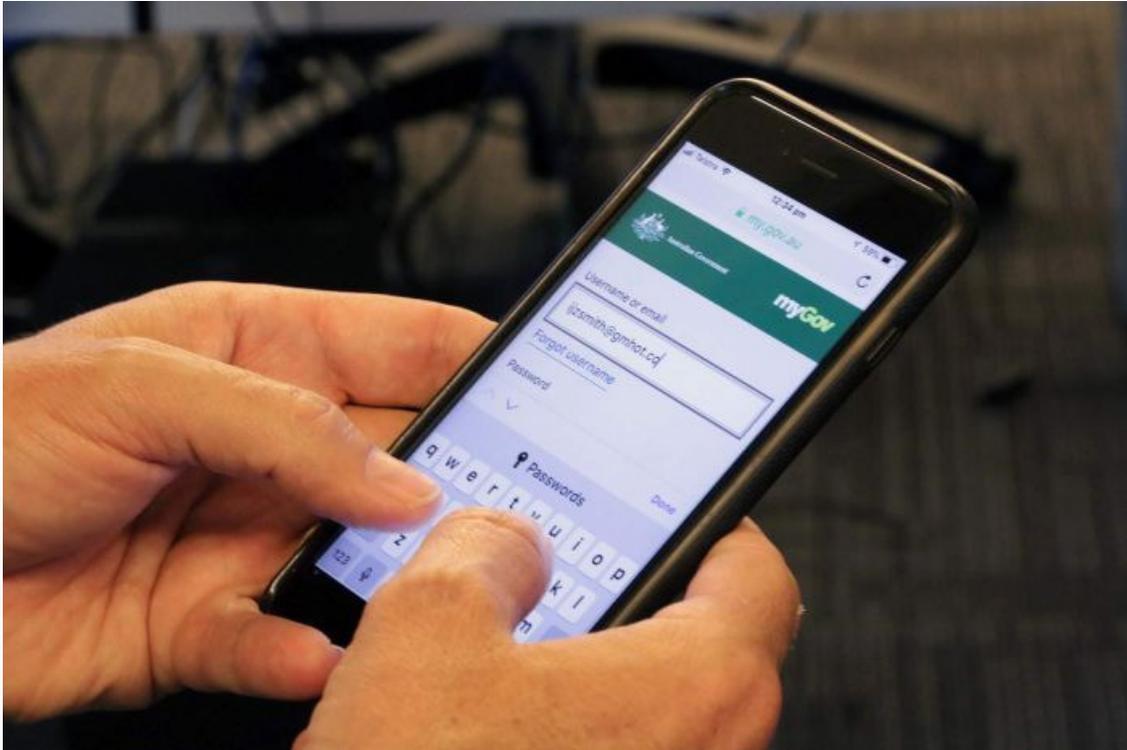


PHOTO: You can do your application online, on the Express Plus Centrelink app. (ABC News: Nick Wiggins)

Do I have to apply for work to get Centrelink payments during coronavirus?

In order to keep getting the JobSeeker Payment and Youth Allowance for jobseekers, there are things you must do, like apply for jobs or undergo training.

These are called mutual obligation requirements.

But for the six months starting April 27, 2020, the Government has introduced some new rules because of coronavirus.

It means sole traders and self-employed people who now earn less than \$1,075 a fortnight will meet their mutual obligation requirements just by continuing to operate their business.

They won't have to apply for other jobs.

Neither will people who are caring for someone who is infected or in isolation due to coronavirus.

Stay up-to-date on the coronavirus outbreak

- [Download the ABC News app and subscribe to our range of news alerts for the latest on how the pandemic is impacting the world](#)

For those who have lost their jobs, or had their shifts cut, they will still need to look for work, but [the requirements have been reduced to four job searches a month](#) (one per week) to reflect the softening labour market.

In some circumstances, you might get permission to do training or volunteer work to meet your mutual obligation requirements.

The new rules also allow you to seek an exemption from your mutual obligation requirements without a doctor's certificate if you have caring responsibilities or need to self-isolate due to coronavirus.

[You may also be exempt 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 premise has closed.

During your exemption period, you won't need to attend appointments, look for work or do any of the activities in your job plan.

But you will need to call Centrelink to get an exemption (which might be a big job on its own).

Remind me, how do I get a CRN?

You used to have to show up to a Centrelink office in person with photo ID and a range of other documents to prove your identity in person.

Then they'd give you a Customer Reference Number (CRN) and you could start your application online.

But you no longer need to attend a Centrelink office in person.

Just call Centrelink (wait on hold) and tell them who you are.



PHOTO: These people were queueing outside the Centrelink office in Darlinghurst, Sydney, but there's no need to do that anymore. (ABC News: David Taylor)

Will Centrelink be open?

Yes, it's an essential service so their offices are open.

But they really don't want you to go there in person.

There are a few reasons.

They're incredibly busy so the lines are long.

On Monday, in some places, they went around the block and people definitely weren't adhering to social distancing guidelines (remember [you're supposed to be at least 1.5 metres away from other people to reduce the spread of coronavirus](#)).

Centrelink is also trying to protect the health of its staff.

And now that they've waived the requirement to prove your identity in person, most people won't need to attend a service centre because it can all be done over the phone or online.