

GETTING OUT

CENTRELINK

There have been some changes to the way Centrelink operates since COVID-19, including the amount that you get paid and what you have to do to keep getting paid. There are a lot more people who are trying to get help due to the pandemic. This means that it can take a long time to speak to someone on the phone, or that there can be long lines at Centrelink to see someone. It might take extra time for your payment to get sorted out. If you need a bit of extra support give CRC a call on (02) 9288 8700.





I am in prison and want to organize Centrelink before I get out

Centrelink has a special prisons unit that helps people before they get out of prison to get their payments organised so there is money in your account on the day of release. If you have a release date, have been in prison for more than 14 days, and you have been on Centrelink before, there is a system in place to organise getting your payment sorted before you get out.

How can I organise payment before I get out?

If it is coming up to your release and no-one has spoken to you about organising Centrelink payments, ask to speak to a SAPO (Services and Programs Officer). They can organise a phone call with staff at Centrelink who are there to help people in prison. Try and organise to do this at least a week before you get out. If you have confirmed your identity with Centrelink in the past, they will be able to organise your payment by running through what is called 'an alternate identification process'. If you have received Centrelink before but they do not have a record of your confirmed identification, you will still be able to receive a payment, but will need to confirm your identity with them once you get out. You will have six months to do this. You will need to have details of a bank account that Centrelink can put money into when you call them.





Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and ID

If you are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and you don't have enough identification for a payment, you can sign a Confirmation of Identity form with Centrelink. You might need to ask for this, because it isn't always something that Centrelink staff will offer. Signing this form allows up to 12 weeks for you to obtain the ID needed for Centrelink without your payments being suspended. A link to this form is [here](#)

What if I don't have a bank account?

If you don't have your own bank account, you can nominate to use someone else's bank account until you do. You will need to get a Centrelink form to nominate a bank account from a SAPO. You will need to fill the form out, and then send it to the person whose bank account you plan to use. They will need to fill out a section of it, and then take it in to Centrelink. This can take a bit of time, so try and do this at least four weeks before you are due to get out. When choosing a bank account to nominate, it is best to make it someone in your family who you really trust. Later, when you are out and have had a chance to open your own bank account, you can change your details with Centrelink. If you are not able to organise opening a bank account, and there is no-one else's bank account you can use, it is also possible to request an EBT (Electronic Bank Transfer) card for your first payment. After this you can organise a bank account for following payments.

What if I can't organise Centrelink before I get out?

Sometimes it isn't possible to organise payments before release. Sometimes this is because Centrelink might need more information to work out the right payment for you, or they might not have a record of you on their system. If you don't know your release date in advance (for instance, if you are on remand, or you are released unexpectedly on parole) it can also be very difficult to organise Centrelink before you leave prison.

If you do end up getting out of prison with no Centrelink, you should go to a Centrelink office as soon as you can. You need to go in the first seven days after you have been released. You should take any identification that you have, your bank account details and your release papers. In the first seven days after you have been released if you are eligible for Centrelink payments you will also be eligible for a crisis payment.

If you are feeling unwell do not attend centrelink in person. Call Centrelink (numbers are at the bottom of this factsheet) to ask how you should get started.





How much money will I get?

There are a few different kinds of Centrelink payments and how much you get depends on the payment type that you are eligible for.

Jobseeker is for people who are looking for work.

The **Disability Support pension** is for people with disabilities who have difficulty working because of their disability (there are strict eligibility criteria for this).

Youth Allowance is for people who are under 22 years of age, including people who are looking for work.

Payment rates for Jobseeker and some forms of Youth Allowance have temporarily increased since COVID-19 because of a new payment called the Coronavirus supplement. Payment amounts are different for different people so it is best to check with Centrelink about your own situation. The amounts below are an example of what you would receive if you are a single person, with no children, who is eligible for the full amount of Jobseeker (the old Newstart). The government have said that the coronavirus supplement won't go beyond September 2020, which means the total amounts below will be halved.

The fortnightly payment for people on Jobseeker is \$565.70. The Coronavirus supplement is \$550 a fortnight. This means that if you are eligible for Jobseeker, from April 2020 you will receive both of these, a total \$1,115.70 per fortnight. You will receive this extra money until the end of September. It can take a little bit of time for this to get sorted into a regular payment, and this can make budgeting your payments for the first few weeks after prison really challenging.

When you are released from prison you will receive a crisis payment. This is a one-off payment of approximately \$280. At the same time as you receive the crisis payment you can elect to receive the first HALF payment of your Jobseeker allowance. Most people leaving prison choose to do this. At the moment this is \$280 Jobseeker, PLUS \$270 of the Coronavirus supplement.

This means that when you leave prison, there will be approximately \$830 in your bank account. Two weeks after that, you will receive the second half of your jobseeker payment which will be about \$550 (\$280 plus \$270 of the Coronavirus supplement). This will need to last you another two weeks.

You will receive the full payment of \$1,115.70 every fortnight as long as you meet the eligibility criteria. You will receive the Coronavirus supplement until the end of September. After that, you will only receive the Jobseeker allowance rate of \$565.70 per fortnight.



If you are on the full Disability Support Pension your rates of payment have not changed. On release you will receive a crisis payment of \$470 PLUS \$470 (which is the first half of your full payment). In total, you will receive \$940. This will need to last you for two weeks. And then you will receive the second half of your first payment which will be \$470. This will need to last you another two weeks. After that you will receive \$940 per fortnight.

Remember, everyone's circumstances are different. These are examples of two of the most common payment types. Centrelink will make decisions about what you qualify for based on how much money you have, whether or not you have any kind of work, whether or not you have kids, and whether or not you have a partner.

Do I need to prove that I am looking for work?

If you are on Jobseeker, then yes, but there are some changes to this because of COVID. Jobseeker payments usually means you have to keep looking for work and be able to prove you are looking for work. A lot of people are having problems looking for work during COVID-19 because there are not as many jobs as there once were. It is best to check directly with Centrelink about what your obligations are in terms of looking for work. It is possible to write to Centrelink to ask for a six month exemption from looking for work if you have just been released from prison and are very stressed. There are also social workers at Centrelink that you can talk to about your situation as well.

Can I organise to get paid without going in to the Centrelink office?

Because of the COVID-19 crisis, at the moment you can call up and organise your payment without going in to an office. Make sure you have all your ID and bank account information with you when you make the call. It is not easy to get through on the phone because many people are trying to get through to Centrelink. It is a good idea to prepare yourself for a long wait, so make sure you are somewhere comfortable and safe, without too much background noise before you call.

Call 132 850 for Jobseeker, Crisis payments or to ask to speak to Social Worker

Call 132 490 for Youth Allowance

Call 132 717 for the Disability Support Pension

