

COVID-19 FAQ

The AMWU asked the government some of the most frequently asked questions members have asked us. Here's what they said.

What is the qualification period for Centrelink payments?

The first one-off \$750 payment will be received by those who are receiving a payment from Centrelink between 12 March and 13 April.

The Coronavirus supplement will be paid from 27 April for 6 months for individuals who are already receiving eligible payments.

What about means testing? For our members this is a major problem, as anyone whose partner is earning more than \$48,000 doesn't qualify.

The Government has earlier this week raised the income testing threshold to \$79,762. So if you apply for the JobSeeker program, you will be eligible if as a couple you are earning less than \$3,068 per fortnight.

Is there assistance available by State Government to industry to retool for items such as ventilators, masks, sanitisers?

Please contact a member of the State Government for a response on what the State Government is doing.

The Federal Government is deploying personnel through Defence Assistance to the Civil Community (DACC) arrangements to help sites, such as Med-Con in Shepparton, to ramp up production.

Does job seeker always insist you must use your entitlements first? If so, how much?

Yes, people will need to exhaust all leave that is available to them. If a stood down employee has no leave available they only need to declare so during the application process.

Is it up to individuals to negotiate a 6-month mortgage break?

Each bank has unique policies in place to respond to customers seeking mortgage breaks and different procedures, it is recommended that an individual's first point of contact be their lender to see what options they have available.

What about early access to superannuation? Is it about hardship and if so, what is that hardship?

From the ATO:

Conditions for eligibility of early access to super

- You are unemployed.
- You are eligible to receive a job seeker payment, youth allowance for jobseekers, parenting payment (which includes the single and partnered payments), special benefit or farm household allowance.
- On or after 1 January 2020, either
 - you were made redundant
 - your working hours were reduced by 20% or more
 - if you are a sole trader, your business was suspended or there was a reduction in your turnover of 20% or more.

What are the future implications to super balance if you access your super early?

If a worker aged 25 withdraws their super earlier under the temporary new regime they risk missing out between \$58,000 to \$84,000 in retirement savings once they decide to exit the workforce.

If you are in your 30s, you risk missing out between \$45,000 to \$70,000.

If you're in your 50s, that is between \$24,000 to \$27,000. (Source: Industry Super Australia)

Employees will need to consider between short-term relief and long-term gain.

Who is entitled to government funding? Clear guidelines of entitlements people can claim (i.e. worker stood down, Wife/ De facto earns \$55,000 - what is the worker who has been stood down entitled to? Single worker stood down, \$200,000 in savings account, what government funding is the worker entitled to? etc)

Increased eligibility for the JobSeeker Payment and Youth Allowance for job seekers. You will be eligible if you're:

- a permanent employee who has been stood down or lost your job
- a sole trader, self-employed, casual or contract worker whose income has reduced
- or caring for someone who's effected by coronavirus.

All of the following have been waived:

- ordinary waiting period
- liquid asset test waiting period
- newly arrived residents waiting period
- seasonal work preclusion period
- mutual obligation or participation requirements
- assets test.

The income testing has been raised to \$79,762 for an individual or a couple, approximately \$3,068 per fortnight.

The first one-off \$750 payment will be paid to you from 31 March. You will be eligible if you're either receiving the following payments or hold one of the following concession cards:

- Age Pension
- Disability Support Pension
- Carer Payment
- Carer Allowance
- Parenting Payment
- Wife Pension
- Widow B Pension
- ABSTUDY (Living Allowance)
- Austudy
- Pensioner Concession Card (PCC) holders
- Commonwealth Seniors Health Card holders
- Veteran Service Pension
- Veteran Income Support Supplement
- Veteran Compensation payments, including lump sum payments
- War Widow(er) 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
- 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

The coronavirus supplement of \$550 a fortnight will be paid from 27 April for 6 months if you are already getting an eligible payment. You will automatically get the supplement each fortnight on top of the payment you receive from one of these payments:

- JobSeeker Payment
- Youth Allowance
- Parenting Payment
- Farm Household Allowance Special Benefit
- AUSTUDY
- ABSTUDY (living allowance)

The second one-off \$750 payment will be paid to from 13 July if you were eligible for the first one-off payment but do not receive the Coronavirus supplement. To be eligible you must be in Australia at the time and receiving eligible payments or holding an eligible card.

Which food factories in the state of Victoria have been identified to be essential services, if we got to stage 3 Lockdown?

Stage 3 restrictions, which were put in place at midnight 30 March, did not include any restrictions to food factories.

Which services that are linked to the food factories are also essential services to keep these factories running? e.g. Packaging, services like forklifts/warehousing/truck/contract maintenance/site security for the foods site (this is most likely needed to be provided by the company)

Agribusinesses have been deemed an essential service by the Victorian Agricultural Minister from production, processing, to supply, however, the Commonwealth Government is yet to make that statement.

These sites should have access to proper personal protective equipment and sanitisers.

Also these food factories should all be provided and have access to special paid COVID-19 leave as we would not want these sites to be compromised. This leave would be 10 days paid leave and assistance to buy/lease or purchase proper temperature equipment for screening employees before they go on site should be government funded (allays concerns, and fears of workers)

We have contacted Minister Symes office for further details on this, and will make sure that once we have received them, they can be passed on to you.

For companies accessing government funding, are there restrictions on what the funding can be used for? And how does the government monitor this?

We will look into the business component of the stimulus packages further and get back to you soon.

What level of government gives the status on essential work?

National Cabinet, comprising the Prime Minister, the Premiers and the Chief Ministers, decides on the status of essential industries and services.

People need payments before 27th April. Will there be the ability for eligible workers to access the Services Australia Crisis payment in a timely manner, or something similar if a disaster is declared?

The one-off \$750 payment has begun being paid out as of 31 March, Labor is urging the Government bring forward the Coronavirus supplement before 27 April.

Does Services Australia have the ability to process these payments in a timely manner when 27th April comes around?

As part of the stimulus package, the Government committed to expanding Centrelink's capacity handle the extra load of work by recruiting 5,000 new employees.

Currently the payment will reduce by 60 cents for every dollar your partner earns over \$993.50 per fortnight, (which I believe won't affect the COVID-19 supplement of \$550). Will there be a temporary increase/suspension of the partner pay test?

Yes, the income testing has been raised to \$79,762 for an individual or a couple, to approximately \$3,068 per fortnight.

All information on this fact sheet is correct as of April 2nd 2020.

For more updated information, or additional resources, please visit our website at www.amwu.org.au/vic

If you require any additional information contact us at 03 9230 5700.

For more updates, please subscribe to our Facebook page at [facebook.com/amwuvic](https://www.facebook.com/amwuvic)

In regard to mutual obligations (ie. attending job search appointments and completing activities) – these have been suspended until the 31st March 2020. There are a number of people stood down without income, these people theoretically have a job to go back to. Will mutual obligations like attending JobSeeker appointments and applying for a certain amount of jobs be waived for some people? Also, is it likely the suspension of activities will be extended and can there be some certainty around this to relieve stress on an already stressed population.

As it stands, the mutual obligation requirement, the requirement for JobSeeker applicants to apply for jobs during the period of receiving payments, is suspended until 27 April. Services Australia will notify you when you should return to carrying out JobSeeker related activities.

There is no longer a requirement to register with a JobActive service before receiving payment during this time, but once registered, will people be issued demerit points or be penalised for not making it to appointments or completing activities, as is the current jobseeker payment regime? If penalties do occur, is there a strategy for payments to be easily restored if the person gives a reason for non-compliance?

Refer to answer above. Jobseekers will not be penalised if they are unable to make it to an appointment or an activity. Their payments will not be suspended and no compliance action will be undertaken.

30% of Australians pay rent. If they are unable to pay their rent in April, they will be in arrears. Is there going to be a national strategy to prevent people getting behind in their rent that they are at risk of being evicted, or a national temporary ban on evictions to give people some certainty during the time they will be without any income?

National Cabinet has confirmed a 6 month moratorium on evictions if a tenant is unable to pay rent due to coronavirus-induced financial hardships. These changes will need to be enacted through legislation and the Victorian Government is working through them

We will know further details after the 3 April National Cabinet meeting.

The same as above for mortgages – although very few mortgages are in arrears. Will there be certainty around the obligations of lenders to provide “loan holidays” during this time. The big four banks are currently offering some form of deferment, but a government directive and support may be needed for smaller lenders to also come to the party.

From APRA:

APRA will be writing to all authorised deposit-taking institutions (ADIs) to advise them of the specific reporting treatment for loans subject to these support arrangements. APRA will require ADIs to report to APRA, and publicly disclose, the nature and terms of any repayment deferrals and the volume of loans to which they are applied. ADIs must also still continue to provision for these loans under relevant accounting standards.

