



What can Centrelink offer me?

Centrelink supports Australians by delivering a range of services and payments on behalf of the government. It comes under the umbrella of Services Australia, which also includes Medicare.

If you find yourself without, or short of, income for a variety of reasons, you can check whether you are eligible for any support from Centrelink at the following link: <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/guide-to-australian-government-payments?context=1>

Note: For some visas, you may not currently qualify, but Centrelink can provide details of when you may become eligible for the payments to start.

How it works

If you think you are eligible for a Centrelink payment, the online application process (via the link above) is the simplest option.

If you need help to apply, you can contact Centrelink. Their contact details are accessible via this link: <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/contact-us?context=64107>

Keeping things clear with Centrelink

Whenever you get in touch with Centrelink, it is important to keep your communication as clear and consistent as possible to prevent misunderstandings.

You should also keep records of as much as you can. As a guide, for each interaction with Centrelink, you should keep a record of the following:

- o The name of the person you have contact with
- o What is said in the conversation with this person
- o The receipt number for the communication you have with Centrelink.



You should also keep copies of the following:

- o All the documents you provide to Centrelink
- o All of your payslips
- Tip:** when reporting income to Centrelink, make sure to report your gross income (before tax)
- o The Centrelink payments you receive.

How to address problems

If you encounter a problem with your Centrelink payment, there are processes available for you. The common problems – and possible resolutions – are outlined below.

Your claim for income support has been rejected

If your application for income support has been rejected, you can make an appeal. The first step is to ask for an internal review of the decision by an 'authorised review officer' (ARO). This must be done within 13 weeks of the decision to ensure you receive back payment if the decision is reversed.

You disagree with the debt raised

If you have been receiving income support from Centrelink, you may be informed that you owe Centrelink money. You can ask Centrelink to review their decision to raise a debt for one of the following reasons –

- o You believe do not owe Centrelink any money
- o The debt was calculated incorrectly
- o The debt should be otherwise waived.

There is no time limit for lodging this review.

You owe Centrelink money and agree with the debt

If you do owe Centrelink money, call their Debt Recovery line on **1800 076 072** to arrange or renegotiate a payment plan. The instalment amount should not cause you financial hardship, so you should negotiate to ensure the payment plan is affordable. Centrelink can also put the debt on hold for up to 13 weeks.



Important notes about appeals

Appealing Centrelink decisions can take a long time – sometimes up to 18 months or more. There are time limits at each stage of the appeal process. While the time limits can be confusing, it's important to comply with them in order to preserve your entitlement to back pay (in the event that your appeal is successful).

Most decisions can still be appealed outside the strict time limits. In these cases, however, you will only be back paid from the date you requested the appeal.

If you are awaiting a decision by Centrelink, it is important to regularly follow up with them and check your Centrelink App or MyGov account. Doing so helps you to notice when your appeal has entered a new stage, and to notice any new time limits.

When to ask for help

If you need help to understand or appeal a Centrelink decision, please call Social Security Rights Victoria (SSRV)'s free Legal Assistance Line –

Phone: 03 9481 0355 Monday – Friday, 9am – 1pm and 2pm – 5pm

Social Security Rights Victoria is a community legal centre that can help with Centrelink issues. SSRV may be able to give you advice about your specific situation.



Hear this Quick Guide in your language

fcvic.org.au/quick-guides

