

DISABILITY SUPPORT PENSION AND COVID-19 PAYMENTS

Last updated 15 April 2020

This factsheet provides information on the way that Centrelink's new COVID-19 income support payments affect your Disability Support Pension (DSP).

If you are thinking about switching from DSP to JobSeeker Payment (the new name for Newstart Allowance), so you can get the extra supplement - read this factsheet. Changing to JobSeeker Payment will cancel your DSP and you may not be able to get it back again!

For more information, see the section below, 'Should I "switch" from DSP to JobSeeker Payment?'. You can also get free advice from one of our member centres, which you can find by going to <http://ejaustralia.org.au/legal-help-centrelink/>

This factsheet covers the special COVID-19 arrangements in place until September 2020:

- What COVID-19 payments will I receive if I stay on DSP?
- If I stay on DSP, do I need to complete mutual obligations?
- Should I switch from DSP to JobSeeker Payment?

What COVID-19 payments will I receive if I stay on DSP?



If you are currently receiving DSP and do not claim any new payments, you will:

- keep your **Pensioner Concession Card**
- get a **\$750 Economic Support Payment by 13 April**
- get a **\$750 Economic Support Payment in mid-July**

You will receive these payments automatically. You do not need to do anything to get them.

If you have recently applied for DSP, or you are planning to apply for DSP, you will receive the Economic Support Payments after your DSP is granted but only if you claimed or registered your 'intent to claim' DSP by **13 April 2020**. However, if you were getting another type of Centrelink payment between 12 March and 13 April 2020 you will still get one or both of the Economic Support Payments

Crisis Payment



You may be eligible for a Crisis Payment if you are suffering financial hardship and you are:

- required to be in quarantine or self-isolation as a result of advice from the government or a health professional, or
- caring for an immediate family member or a member of your household who is required to be in quarantine or self-isolation.

You must contact Centrelink within 14 days of starting quarantine or self-isolation and let them know about your 'intention to claim'. You then have another 14 days to 'make a claim'. These time limits are very strict so it is important that you follow them carefully.

JobKeeper Payment

From 1 May 2020 you may be able to receive a JobKeeper Payment of \$1,500 per fortnight from your employer if you have been sacked or stood down or lost self-employment income as a result of COVID-19. These payments will be backdated to 30 March 2020.

For more information about JobKeeper Payment and whether you may be eligible to receive it, go to <https://treasury.gov.au/coronavirus/jobkeeper>.

You can stay on DSP and also receive JobKeeper Payment. Your JobKeeper Payments will be **assessed as income** under the DSP income test, as well as any other income you (or your partner) receive. The additional income from JobKeeper Payment may make your income high enough to stop your DSP. It is important to advise Centrelink of any increase in your income within 14 days.

If you reach the DSP income cut-off point (see the link below for current cut-off points), your DSP will stop. Your DSP will be suspended until your income per fortnight drops to below the cut-off point. If you earn income higher than the cut-off point for more than 2 years your DSP will be cancelled.

For more information on DSP income test, see:

<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/disability-support-pension/who-can-get-it/non-medical-rules/income-and-assets-tests/income-test-pensions>

If I stay on DSP will I need to complete mutual obligations?



From 24 March to 27 April 2020 mutual obligation requirements have been suspended.

Some people receiving DSP are required to meet 'mutual obligations' which might include participating in Disability Employment Services, and searching for and applying for jobs.

The Government has temporarily suspended mutual obligation requirements because of the COVID-19 public health measures, until at least 27 April 2020.

After mutual obligations come back into force, Centrelink may grant you a Major Personal Crisis exemption for a period of 14 days, e.g. if you need to care for a family member who is ill.

There are also changes to limit the need for face-to-face contact whilst COVID-19 social distancing measures are in place. These include:

- suspension of participation requirements for DSP
- options for phone or online meetings with service providers and medical professionals
- ability to seek an exemption without medical appointments
- suspension of all DSS initiated DSP medical reviews until the end of June 2020
- reduced job application requirements
- flexibility to adjust job plans

- flexibility for Disability Employment Services participants to seek permissible breaks and ongoing support when an employer has to shut down
- suspension of all Work for the Dole mutual obligations until further notice
- suspension of group activities.

For more information on mutual obligations and applying for a Major Personal Crisis exemption, see our factsheet ‘COVID-19 and Centrelink’.

Should I “switch” from DSP to JobSeeker Payment?

Although fortnightly JobSeeker Payment rates may be higher than DSP for six months, once the Coronavirus Allowance stops the rate of JobSeeker Payment will be much lower than the rate of DSP. Switching may not be the best option for you.

If you choose to claim JobSeeker Payment, your DSP will be cancelled - not suspended. You may not be able to receive DSP again after it has been cancelled. You may also lose your Pensioner Concession Card.

Your entitlements on DSP or JobSeeker Payment are compared below:

Entitlement	DSP	JSP
Pensioner Concession Card	✓	Rules apply
Health Care Card	✗	✓
Long-term Support	✓	✗
Rent Assistance Sharer Exemption	✓	Rules apply
Economic Support Payment 1	✓	✓
Economic Support Payment 2	✓	✗
Temporary Coronavirus Supplement	✗	✓

DSP is a more suitable payment than JobSeeker Payment if you have a long-term disability or medical condition, and you are unable to work 15 hours or more per week in the next 2 years.

If you cancel your DSP to claim JobSeeker Payment, there are some things you should consider:

- DSP eligibility rules have changed and they may not be the same as when you first claimed DSP, so you **may not be able to get back on DSP after the Coronavirus Supplement is finished.**
- To claim DSP again, you will need to:
 - **submit a new complete DSP claim** and provide recent medical evidence from your treating health professionals, and
 - **attend any assessments**, if required, including a Job Capacity Assessment and a Disability Medical Assessment.

A lot of people find this process very time consuming and stressful.

In some cases, you may need to have actively participated in a **Program of Support** for 18 months before you can get DSP again. A Program of Support requires you to undertake activities such as job preparation and looking for jobs, work experience, training and injury management.

This is a very long process and if you are required to participate in a Program of Support you will not receive DSP until you can show that you have done so.

If you claim JobSeeker Payment, you may need to:

- Meet **mutual obligation requirements**. These are things that you must do to get your payments, and may include looking for jobs each week and doing activities to get you ready for work, such as training. Mutual obligations are suspended until 27 April 2020, but may return before the end of the Coronavirus supplement.
- Connect with a **job service provider** and agree to a **Job Plan**. A job plan says the things you have agreed to do to have the best chance of getting a job. Job Plans are reviewed and updated regularly, so there are always ongoing activities that you must do to be getting ready for work.

If you do not meet your mutual requirements or do the things in your Job Plan, your **JobSeeker Payment could be suspended or cancelled**. You will need to consider how you will meet these requirements taking into account your disability or medical condition.

It is possible to get exemptions from the mutual obligation requirements for temporary medical conditions, but not for permanent medical conditions. For more information see our factsheet on Medical Exemptions.

JobSeeker Payment usually has fewer benefits than DSP so after the COVID-19 emergency period, you may find you are worse off.

For more information on your entitlements under DSP compared to JobSeeker Payment, see:

https://pwd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Covid19_DSP_JSP_Factsheet.pdf.

Where can I get help?



If you are considering “switching” to a different Centrelink payment and stopping your DSP, seek advice before you do so. You can get free legal advice from your closest member centre which can be found at <http://ejaustralia.org.au/legal-help-centrelink/>

This factsheet does not constitute legal advice.

Please contact any of our member centres if you wish to obtain free legal advice. Find your closest member centre at www.ejaustralia.org.au