



COVID-19 INCOME SUPPORT MEASURES

A MEAA Fact Sheet

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on our members and the arts and entertainment industry across Australia.

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance's position is that employers should be doing everything in their power to keep employees, casuals, contractors and freelancers on their payroll. This includes passing on the stimulus benefits they have received from the government, to you, rather than standing you down on unpaid leave, terminating your employment or requiring you to access Centrelink.

However, if you have been stood down, or have ceased receiving shifts, these are the basics you should know.

The Federal Government announced on March 15 and March 22, that it will:

- pay (for the next six months) a fortnightly \$550 Coronavirus Supplement from 27 April 2020 if you're getting an eligible payment
- the \$550 per fortnight payment will also be available to permanent employees who are stood down or lose their jobs; sole traders; the self-employed; casual workers and contract workers;
- extend eligibility for the first \$750 Economic Support Payment to pay it from 31 March 2020 if you're getting an eligible payment on any day from 12 March to 13 April 2020 see: www.servicessaustralia.gov.au/individuals/news/750-one-economic-support-payment
- pay a second \$750 Economic Support Payment from 13 July 2020 if you're getting

an eligible payment or have an eligible concession card on 10 July 2020.

- expand eligibility for some (unspecified) payments and make them easier to claim
- make Crisis Payment available if you need to self-isolate, are in severe financial hardship and you can get an income support payment see:

www.servicessaustralia.gov.au/individuals/news/more-financial-support-coronavirus-affected-job-seekers

MEAA is fighting to make sure that the \$20,000 and \$100,000 grants to small and medium sized businesses are devoted to keeping workers employed. There is no requirement at the moment.

Frequently asked questions

Can I apply for Centrelink if I am stood down on unpaid leave?

Yes. A person on unpaid leave can be considered unemployed for Centrelink purposes if they are unable to resume their employment and they are willing to look for suitable work, or meet other participation requirements during the period of leave.

If Centrelink argues that this is not the case, direct them to Section 3.2.2.20 of the Social Security Guide and the heading "Leave from employment (including stand downs without pay)". This can be found at guides.dss.gov.au/guide-social-security-law/3/2/2/20

I'm a casual employee, have I been stood down? How can I access Centrelink?

As a casual, you haven't necessarily been stood down. At law, if you are a casual and have stopped receiving shifts, then your employer does not have to stand you down as they do not have an obligation to provide you with ongoing work.

Given the circumstances, you can request a letter from your employer confirming that due to COVID-19, there is no availability for shifts, which can be provided to Centrelink.

Generally speaking, employees who have been 'stood down' are permanent employees who have been stood down without pay under section 524 of the Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth). They still remain employed by their employer.

Will I receive an employment separation certificate to provide to Centrelink?

We understand that some employers are issuing casuals with formal letters (on letterhead) confirming that they are not offering shifts due to COVID-19, for example due to temporary closures of buildings. This may be sufficient for Centrelink's purposes. We will continue to update you as we hear more on this.

If you are a permanent employee who has been stood down without pay, you should not receive a separation certificate, as your employment has not ended. In this circumstance we recommend seeking written confirmation from your employer (on their letterhead) that you have been stood down without pay to provide to Centrelink.

If your employment has been terminated or cancelled and you will definitely not be returning to work, your employer should provide you with an employment separation certificate so you can provide it to Centrelink.

Can I ask to be on annual leave whilst I am stood down?

Generally speaking, yes, you should be able to access it immediately, subject to your employer's acceptance.

If your employer does not agree to allow you to access leave, please inform the MEAA. However, you cannot receive Centrelink payment and annual leave at the same time.

Can I receive Centrelink and be on annual leave, personal (sick) leave or long service leave?

No. As far as MEAA is aware, you cannot access employer entitlements, including annual leave, personal (sick) leave, long service leave, or income protection insurance at the same time as receiving a JobSeeker Payment or Youth Allowance for job seekers.

What happens if you're not already getting a payment and need to claim?

If you claim one of the eligible payments and Centrelink approve your claim, you'll also get the supplement. You can claim online through myGov using a Centrelink online account, or phone them.

The Government will also waive asset testing from 27 April for 6 months, except for the Farm Household Allowance and Special Benefit.

Income testing will still apply.

Centrelink has now implemented a 3 month waiving of the Ordinary Waiting Period. This will continue while these temporary arrangements are in place.

What to do now

- Given the current health warnings, we recommend that if you intend to apply to Centrelink that you do so remotely either via phone or online.
- Begin your application for Centrelink here: www.servicessaustralia.gov.au/individuals/se

[rvices/centrelink/jobseeker-payment/how-claim](http://www.servicessaustralia.gov.au/individuals/se)

- Get confirmation (such as a letter) that you have been stood down without pay on letterhead. Some employers have provided this already. If you are stood down, your employment hasn't ended and you will not get a 'separation of employment letter'.



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