



## Frequently Asked Questions – (Students)

This fact sheet contains general information about some of the frequently asked questions we receive at Welfare Rights & Advocacy Service WA.

WRASWA is a not for profit community legal centre that provides independent advice, information, referral, representation and advocacy in relation to Centrelink, Family Assistance, Tenancy and Social Security prosecution matters.

The information contained in this fact sheet does not constitute legal advice.

If you need legal advice in relation to Centrelink in Western Australia please contact:

1. Welfare Rights & Advocacy Service on 08 9328 1751;
2. Sussex Street Community Legal Centre on 08 6253 9500; or
3. Fremantle Community Legal Centre on 08 9432 9790.

### What can I claim?

There are different payments available for young people depending on factors such as age, if you are studying, if you are working and your family situation.

Commonly claimed payments for young people who are studying, undertaking an apprenticeship, working or looking for work are:

- Youth Allowance (Student or Apprentice);
- Youth Allowance (Job Seeker);
- Austudy;
- Abstudy; and
- New Start Allowance.

Other payments that are available and can sometimes be more suitable depending on your circumstances are Disability Support Pension, Family Tax Benefit, Parenting Payment, Carers Payment and Special Benefit.

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For more information about the criteria for these payments, visit the Department of Human Services Centrelink website.

### What documents and information do I need to claim?

The documents and information you will need will depend on the kind of payment or benefit you are applying for. Examples of the kinds of documents and information required are:

- Proof of Identity;
- Tax File Number;
- Proof of residency or Australian Citizenship;
- Bank account details;
- Confirmation of enrollment;
- Relationship status;
- Employment separation certificate;
- Evidence of parental income; and
- Evidence of Personal income.

If you are having difficulty being able to provide information or a document required by Centrelink to process your claim, there may be exceptions or alternative ways to provide Centrelink with what they need. You should discuss this with an officer at Centrelink. If you are unable to resolve the issue, contact your local Welfare Rights Centre.

## What is Reporting?

Reporting is providing information to Centrelink. The information you have to report depends on the kind of payment that you are receiving.

If you are receiving a Centrelink payment you will be required to report unless you have an exemption allowing you not to report.

You must report:

- your income every fortnight; and
- a change in your circumstances within 14 days of a change occurring.

It is important to understand what you are required to report for the payment or benefit you are receiving.

Failing to report or not reporting correctly can mean you are not being paid correctly and can sometimes lead to you having a debt or being prosecuted.

If you realise you made a mistake reporting, you should let Centrelink know as soon as possible.

## Do I really need to report my income every fortnight?

Yes. You must report your income to Centrelink every fortnight unless Centrelink have advised you that you do not have to report.

Even if your income for one fortnight is zero, Centrelink still requires this information to calculate your rate correctly.

Do not rely on Centrelink to obtain information about your income, if you are receiving a payment it is your responsibility to inform them.

It is important to remember that Centrelink conducts data matching with the Australian Taxation office and other bodies. This means that they are able to check information you provide to make sure that it is correct BUT they don't do this regularly so you could end up with a large debt if you aren't reporting properly and they don't check for several months or years.

## What if I forget to report?

You can still report online up to 13 days after your reporting date. If you are any later than this, call 132 850 or visit a Centrelink office. It is best to follow this up as soon as it comes to your attention to avoid issues with your payments.

As a rule of thumb if you report late your payment will be late. If you don't report at all, you will not get paid.

You can get Centrelink to remind you to report your income. If you report online your next report date will be given to you and it is your responsibility to set a reminder.

If you log into your Centrelink online account, you can register to receive notifications via online letters, SMS or email.

## I received birthday money do I need to report this?

Money that you receive as a one-off gift, which can't be reasonably expected to be received or repeated, is not counted as income in the income test.

However, even if it is exempt from the income test when you receive it, it is still considered a financial asset. This means it might affect your payment under the assets test.

Receiving a gift that may alter the amount of assets you have is a change in circumstances so you are required to report it to Centrelink within 14 days.

If you tell Centrelink about the gift and they tell you it won't affect your payment, get a receipt number of that conversation.

It is a good idea to keep a note of your conversation and get a receipt number when you speak to Centrelink so that you have a record if issues arise later.

## What is a 'de-facto' relationship?

A de facto relationship is where a couple is in a 'marriage like' relationship (with someone of the same or opposite sex). Being in a relationship or dating someone does not mean you are in a de facto relationship unless it meets the test set out in the rules Centrelink has to follow.

## How do I know if I am in a 'de-facto' relationship?

The aspects of a relationship that Centrelink will consider when assessing if you are a member of a couple (unless it is registered or you are married) are:

1. The nature of the household;
2. The financial aspects of the relationship
3. The social aspects;
4. The nature of the people's commitment to each other; and
5. Any sexual relationship that exists between them.

If you are receiving Youth Allowance you will not be recognised as a member of a couple until the length of your relationship is 12 months or more. In special circumstances a relationship can be recognised after 6 months.

## I have changed the course I am studying, do I need to report this?

Yes. The sorts of things you have to report to Centrelink include any change to your course, your place of study, if you start or stop any units or if you change from full-time to part-time (or vice-versa).

If you stop studying altogether you must inform Centrelink.

There may be ways that you can continue to receive payments and this can be explained to you by an officer at Centrelink.

If the reason you stop studying is because you have become sick or injured, you should inform Centrelink about this. You may be eligible for an exemption for a period of time.

## I don't agree with a decision, what can I do about it?

You can apply for a decision to be reviewed. An appeal within Centrelink can be made by telling Centrelink you are unhappy with a decision and you would like to appeal to an Authorised Review Officer (ARO).

It is best to lodge an appeal within 13 weeks from the date of the decision so you can be paid arrears if your appeal is successful. There is no time limit to appeal a debt.

There are no time limits on lodging an appeal to an ARO so you can appeal after 13 weeks has passed – you can get advice about whether it is worth appealing after 13 weeks has passed from a welfare rights centre.

It is best to lodge your appeal in writing and keep a copy. If you lodge an appeal over the phone, make sure you keep a record of the date and a receipt number for the conversation.

The appeal process is free and you can ask for payment pending review.

If your appeal to the ARO is unsuccessful you can appeal to the first tier of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

For more information about the Administrative Appeal Tribunals and the appeals process, please visit our website at [www.wraswa.org.au](http://www.wraswa.org.au) . There is an appeals fact sheet under the resources tab.

## Some useful tips to remember:

- Always ask for a receipt number when you speak to Centrelink officers and make a note of what was said
- If you provide documents to Centrelink ask for a stamped and dated copy of the document to keep for your own records
- Advise Centrelink of changes in circumstances within 14 days.
- Set up reporting reminders in your phone or diary, whatever works for you to make sure you do not forget to report.
- Always read the front and back of letters, if you do not understand something, contact Centrelink to clarify.
- Never ignore letters/ requests from Centrelink.

## Please note

This information contains general information only and is accurate at May 2016. It does not constitute legal advice. If you need legal advice about social security entitlements, please contact your local Welfare Rights Centre/Advocate.

Welfare Rights Centres are community legal centres, which specialise in social security law, administration and policy. They are entirely independent of Centrelink. All assistance is free.

Contact Welfare Rights & Advocacy Service on (08) 93281751 or by email at [welfare@wraswa.org.au](mailto:welfare@wraswa.org.au)

## Helpful links

### Fact Sheets

- There are a range of fact sheets available from the National Welfare Rights Network and the Welfare Rights Centres across Australia. Visit <http://www.welfarerights.org.au/factsheets> to see if any of the fact sheets can assist you.
- There are some additional fact sheets on our website. They can be found at <http://www.wraswa.org.au/resources/>.

### Department of Human Services

- The Department of Human Services Centrelink website has a range of information. <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/dhs/centrelink>.
- They also have a range of YouTube videos which are helpful to provide an overview. You can browse the videos at <https://www.youtube.com/c/humanservicesgovau>.
- The Department of Human Services has a range of Facebook pages which are useful for keeping informed. 'Like' Student Update to keep updated on your news feed <https://www.facebook.com/StudentUpdate>.