

Social Security Rights Victoria Assistance for people and businesses affected by bushfires

Updated 20 August 2020

Social Security Rights Victoria (SSRV) is a state-wide community legal centre that provides specialist legal advice and assistance in relation to Centrelink matters. These guidelines outline the assistance that SSRV may provide to

- individuals
- small businesses and primary producers
- legal and community workers

from areas in Victoria which have been affected by bushfires.

Assistance for individuals

General Advice Line

Monday – Thursday

9.30am – 12.30pm

(03) 9481 0355

0419 793 652 (direct during remote servicing)

Rural callers 1800 094 164

Please note: SSRV does not provide initial information and advice services via email. Email inquiries will be referred to the General Advice Line.

SSRV's **General Advice Line** provides free and independent advice to assist people to understand legal rights and options in relation to Centrelink entitlements, obligations and decisions. This may include matters such as:

- eligibility for pensions and allowances
- variation, suspension or cancellation of payments
- overpayments or debts raised by Centrelink
- internal reviews of Centrelink decisions
- Administrative Appeals Tribunal proceedings.

General Advice Line workers can:

- talk through legal problems
- give advice on options and next steps
- offer resources to assist with understanding or taking action in relation to the legal problem
- advice whether SSRV may be able to offer further legal assistance.

Further Legal Assistance and Representation

SSRV has limited resources so we must prioritise the provision of more intensive assistance, such as legal casework or representation services. *Eligibility Guidelines* (see attached) are used to assist us to balance need for our services and maximising the impact of our limited resources.

We will generally prioritise providing more intensive assistance to people who are vulnerable and disadvantaged and to workers who are assisting people who are vulnerable and disadvantaged. That the person has been affected by bushfires is a factor that is considered.

Pathways to consideration for further legal assistance are via the General Advice Line or through referral by another lawyer or community worker. Individuals will be advised that their matter is being considered for further legal assistance and of the decision.

Assistance for businesses

Small business owners and primary producers from bushfire affected areas are can call the **General Advice Line**, see above. SSRV staff will assess whether the call is in relation to a social security matter and if SSRV can assist.

If it is a social security matter and it relates to the caller, information and advice will be provided as per General Advice Line, see above.

If it is a social security matter and it relates to another person, such as employee, customer or family member, general information may be provided and a suggestion made that the person be referred to General Advice Line.

If SSRV is unable to assist, an appropriate referral will be made. This may include a warm referral to Justice Connect which is able to make pro bono referrals for a broader range of business-related matters (see *Justice Connect bushfire referral guidelines 2020*).

Assistance for community lawyers and workers

Worker Help Line

Monday – Thursday

9.00am – 5.00pm

(03) 9481 0655

0429 450 346 (direct during remote servicing)

Please note: SSRV does not provide initial information and advice services via email. Email inquiries will be referred to the General Advice Line.

Professionals assisting people from bushfire affected regions in Victoria with social security matters are invited to use the **Worker Help Line**. This may include lawyers, financial counsellors, community and health workers, disability advocates and other professionals.

Assistance may include:

- assessment of warm referral
- secondary consultation
- provision of written follow up information
- offer to recommend matter to case intake meeting to consider further legal task or representation assistance.

Where SSRV accepts a referral from a professional in bushfire affected area, upon request and with client consent, SSRV will update referrer as to outcome of referral.

SSRV also offers **community legal education** to other professionals to assist in building confidence and capability in identifying and providing appropriate responses to social security legal problems.

Further Information

Email: info@ssrv.org.au

Website: www.ssrv.org.au

Phone: (03) 9481 0299 (Administration Line)