

Worker Help

Line:

03 9481 0655

Legal

Assistance

Line:

03 9481 0355

Member of Couple for Centrelink purposes

- Payment rates are calculated on a single or partnered basis. Separation can include no longer living together or separated under the one roof. After separation, client should update their relationship details with Centrelink and seek single rate of payment.
- Consider advising Centrelink of family violence if there are safety concerns as Centrelink may contact the ex-partner to verify relationship details.
- Some issues SSRV can assist clients and workers with include:
 - Where a client lived or continues to live with a partner whilst receiving single rate of a payment;
 - Incorrect reporting of their or their partner's income;
 - Complex relationship status (for example: on-off or undefined relationships).

Section 24 – Discretion not to be treated as a member of a couple for a special reason

- Centrelink has discretion to treat some people as being single instead of partnered, for payment rate purposes. There must be a special reason to do so.
- Some issues SSRV can assist client and workers with include:
 - Living with partner, receiving partnered rate of payment, but experiencing family violence;
 - Centrelink debt due to being partnered and were experiencing family violence.

Centrelink debts

- Centrelink debts can be reviewed.
- Repayments on a debt can be paused pending the review outcome.
- If no review pending or to occur, repayment rates can be negotiated with Centrelink's Debt Recovery line (depending on circumstances, can be negotiated to \$10-15 per fortnight).
- There are 3 stages of review: one internal review with Centrelink, and two tiers of review with the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.
- Centrelink debts may be waived due to administrative error or special circumstances.
- There are risks inherent in seeking review of a debt, including risk that the debt is recalculated to a higher amount. Providing self-incriminating information on review can increase risk of a fraud investigation and potential prosecution.
- We recommend clients seek advice before seeking review of a debt relating to family violence.

Family Tax Benefit

- FTB commonly result in debts as payment rate relies upon projections of annual family income.
- Estimation of family income should be kept updated with Centrelink as circumstances throughout the year change; this includes separating and recoupling.
- FTB has requirements for seeking child support from the other parent. Exemptions for situations of family violence are available.

Assisting clients

- We recommend client ensures ex-partner no longer has access or permission to enquire with Centrelink on their behalf. Remove any nominee arrangement, change passwords.
- We recommend Centrelink payment is paid to a bank account ex-partner cannot access.
- Operational Blueprint allows Centrelink to accept implied authority from Financial Counsellors to speak on their client's behalf (ie. where you have verbal authority to contact Centrelink).
- Difficulty accessing payments, rejection of claim or cancellation of payments- Contact SSRV Worker Helpline for secondary consultation or refer client to SSRV for advice.