

Centrelink and Disasters



Who we are

Social Security Rights Victoria (SSRV) is a community legal centre that provides free legal advice and assistance for Social Security, family assistance and Centrelink matters to people who live in Victoria.

The SSRV team assists people with issues including:

- understanding rights of review of Centrelink decisions
- refusal, suspension or cancellation of payments
- management and review of debts
- Disability Support Pension eligibility
- review of Centrelink decisions where clients are impacted by family violence
- secondary consultations for social, community and health workers (such as financial counsellors, disability advocates, social workers, doctors and community lawyers) to help with clients.

We can assist clients to navigate Federal disaster payments, working alongside support workers to provide advice and assistance.

We operate the free resource www.dsphelp.org.au for Disability Support Pension applicants and their support workers, to provide guidance and understanding through the application process.

Worker Help Line

03 9481 0655

Legal Assistance Line

03 9481 0355

Getting help

1. Legal Assistance Line

Victorians experiencing a Centrelink issue can contact our Legal Assistance Line Monday to Thursday 9am to 4.30pm. If appropriate, a legal advice appointment will be booked with a SSRV lawyer.

2. Worker Help Line

Available Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm, community lawyers and workers can contact us for information or secondary consultation with an SSRV lawyer. Messages are returned within two business days. Warm referrals and dedicated advice appointments for referred clients are available.

3. Community Legal Education

We offer disaster-related and other professional development for community lawyers and workers, tailored to your needs. We also provide in-person community engagement, working closely with you to support your community in a trauma- and disaster-informed way.

See our Frequently Asked Questions and help overleaf

Payments available to assist with relief and recovery

- An individual impacted by disaster may become eligible for new or existing payments.
- **Crisis Payment** (for other extreme circumstances) is available for relocation due to a disaster.
 - Specific eligibility criteria apply and can be found on [Centrelink's website](https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/crisis-payment-for-other-extreme-circumstances). Must be applied for within 7 days of applicant deciding they cannot return home. www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/crisis-payment-for-other-extreme-circumstances
- **Disaster Payment and Disaster Allowance** may become available through Centrelink for specified local government areas affected by declared disasters.
 - **Disaster Payment** is a one-off lump sum payment, and Disaster Allowance is a temporary income support payment for people who have lost income as a direct result of the disaster. The payments each have specific eligibility requirements.
 - When applying for **Disaster Allowance** we recommend keeping records of documents which show loss of income as Centrelink may later review eligibility.
 - More information can be found at www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/natural-disaster-support
- State Governments will often release emergency payments to assist with relief and recovery.
 - We recommend accessing the 'VicEmergency' website www.emergency.vic.gov.au
 - The 'Relief & Recovery' page will show current disasters, state payments available and contact details for more information on available payments.
 - www.vic.gov.au/emergency-recovery-victoria has updated information on current and past disasters and available support, including payments.

Identification documents

- Identification documents are often required to apply for new payments. Where a person loses their identity documents due to a disaster,

an **Alternative Identity Form** can be used to temporarily establish identity for the purpose of quickly receiving payments.

Updating Centrelink information - change of circumstances and postal address

- Centrelink recipients must update Centrelink within 14 days of any change in circumstances that might affect their payment. This includes relocation and changes in care of children. Updating changes in circumstances reduces the risk of overpayments and future debts.
- Centrelink will sometimes send important notices and correspondence via post, particularly where legislation requires. Centrelink recipients should update their postal address with Centrelink if necessary. Many post offices allow post to be sent to their care.

Pause on mutual obligations

- Mutual obligations may be automatically paused by Workforce Australia, or can be paused upon individual request of a recipient. [Workforce Australia's website](https://www.workforceaustralia.gov.au) will provide updated details of locations with paused obligations, check these regularly as they can be changed or extended.
- Contact [Centrelink](https://www.centrelink.gov.au) to request an individual pause if not automatically done by Workforce Australia.

Leaving the principal home and insurance payouts – effect on Centrelink payments

- Centrelink recipients who relocate from their principal home due to a disaster can seek to have their home be exempted from the assets test under 'temporary vacation of property' provisions for up to 24 months. These exemptions are not automatic and usually need to be requested.
- Insurance payouts can also be exempted from the assets test for a period of time.
- There are requirements to be actively rebuilding and/or repairing to access these exemptions.

Debts and compensation preclusion periods

- Being impacted by a disaster can be considered a 'special circumstance' for the purpose of seeking a compensation preclusion period reduction or waiver of a Centrelink debt.



**Holstep
Health**

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www.ssrsv.org.au

If you have any questions or client queries about the above content, [please call us to discuss](#). SSRV welcomes contact and queries from workers and clients. This factsheet has been designed as general information for Victorian Community Legal Centres and should not be relied upon as legal advice. Current at January 2026.