



SORTING OUT YOUR FINANCES DURING A PANDEMIC

Updated on 31/03/2020

Financial hardship isn't a dirty word. Especially given the impacts of COVID-19 on our society. If you've lost your job or source of income to keep you studying at uni, the below tips might help you.

It's not an exhaustive list, and if your circumstances are unique, you may want to speak to someone about them. However, most of the advice below applies even when there's not a pandemic around.

1

Work out what you can afford to pay

Make sure you include things like your wages, Centrelink benefits as well as your expenses. If you need to use a free template, click [here](#).

Your budget plan will come in handy when negotiating with your service providers for payment plans and financial hardship arrangements.

2

Getting support from Centrelink

You do not need to go to an office to get support. Instead visit <http://my.gov.au/>. The site may be slow, but check on it periodically. You can also register an "intent to claim" that will allow your payments to the day you lodge your intent. See below for a dedicated page for accessing Centrelink entitlements.

3

Electricity, Gas and Water Bills

You can talk to your service provider about what you're going through and request a payment plan. If they're unhelpful, ask to speak to their 'hardship department'. Make sure you have a copy of your budget plan and an idea of what you can afford and proof of your income. You may request a temporary stop to your payments. This is often done for definite short-term hardship like temporary unemployment.

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Phone and Internet

Like with your other utilities, contact your service provider and explain your circumstances. Consider downgrading your plan to what your budget plan could allow for. You can ask for the downgrade fee to be waived. You can also request a hardship variation from your provider. Phone and internet providers also have a hardship department which you can request to speak to.

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Rental Support

Let your landlord know you're struggling to pay your rent. At this stage, you may be able to offer a payment plan to your landlord. If you are 14 days or more behind with your payments, you may be issued with a Notice to Vacate. You don't have to leave your home at this stage. There will be a hearing, which presents an opportunity for you to explain your story and request a payment plan. The recent Federal government announcement has not advised how the moratorium will be implemented. For additional information, visit the Consumer Affairs page on [Coronavirus and your rights](#).



GETTING THE MOST OUT OF CENTRELINK

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Keep a record of your interactions with Centrelink

Write down everything you are told, as different administrators can tell you different things. Paperwork has been known to go missing as well, so make sure you screenshot any documents you lodge with them.

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Are you eligible for the Coronavirus supplement?

Rather than fill up this page with instructions, visit [The Guardian's article](#) on the topic as it has links directly to the application form and the eligibility criteria. Bare in mind that this supplement starts from the 27th of April.

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From overseas? You may be eligible for support

While International Students may not be eligible for Centrelink support, you may be given a bridging visa which might make you eligible. The best thing to do is ask Centrelink. It will depend what visa you have, and what family you have here. However, if you are an international student, visit Study Melbourne's site [here](#).

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If you can't get on to them today

As you may know, Centrelink are busy! If you can't get on to them today, they can allow you to register your "Intent to Claim". If approved, it will allow you to backdate a payment to the day you originally intended to claim your payments from.

Current Federal Government measures (as of 25/03/2020)

- Federal government measures \$750 payment from the end of March to recipients of Age pension, Family Tax Benefit, Youth Allowance, Newstart, Austudy, Disability Support, parenting and carer payments.
- Services Australia offering Major Personal Crisis exemption of 14 days for those who cannot meet current income-support obligations due to required isolation.
- Extra payments of \$550 per fortnight over the next six months for new and existing recipients of benefits such as JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, Parenting Payments, Farm Household Allowances and Special Benefits, on top of existing payments.
- An extra \$750 payment to social security, veteran income support recipients and eligible concession card holders, provided from July.
- Individuals in hardship able to access \$10,000 of their superannuation in 2019-20 and \$10,000 in 2020-21.



LOANS, GRANTS, AND BANKS

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Putting a 'Pause' to your payments

All consumer creditors are obligated to provide reasonable support. Given this crisis, six months is reasonable support. You are able to ask your bank to put your payments on hold. This can be for three months, but you can request up to six months and have those payments added to the end of the loan. If your bank refuses, you can call the Australian Financial Complaints Authority (afca.org.au).

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The Utility Relief Grant Scheme

You are able to get up to \$650 per utility to help pay for overdue water, gas or electricity bills. This can equate to \$1950 for all three utilities. If you don't use the full amount on your first application, you can apply again within the two-year period. Losing your job happens to be one of the criteria! To apply for the grant, contact your service provider and request an application. More information can be found [here](#).

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Financial Assistance through Monash University

As a Monash student, you may be eligible for an interest free student loan as well as emergency grants up to \$500 to help pay your bills. Get in touch with Monash Connect to find out more! For more information, click [here](#).

HELPFUL AGENCIES AND ADVOCATES

You don't have to go through this process alone! There are many agencies out there that can offer you advice and support during this time.

- [National Debt Helpline](#) - NDH is a free, independent and confidential service that provides people with [financial counselling](#) to help tackle their debt problems.
- [South East Community Links](#) - They can help connect you with emergency relief, housing support, as well as other services that you might need.
- [The Coronavirus Hotline](#) - If you call 1800 675 398, you can be referred to a range of support services if you happen to be in self-isolation. This also includes receiving food packages.
- [The Community Food Guide](#) - This handy-dandy guide provides a range of places that offers free meals and discounted food options from a number of places around the City of Melbourne.

Sources:

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