



# SORTING OUT YOUR FINANCES DURING A PANDEMIC

Updated on 31/03/2020

## The International Student Edition

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.

Some of the sources of support will be different for International students, which is why we've prepared this guide.

1

### Work out what you can afford to pay

Make sure you include things like your wages, any money you receive from family 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.

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### Getting support from Study Melbourne

Study Melbourne have moved to supporting International Students via their website as well as through emails and phone. Start by visiting their website [here](#). Alternatively, you can make a phone appointment by emailing them on [info@studymelbourne.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@studymelbourne.vic.gov.au). Study Melbourne also offer free, confidential legal advice for international students for accommodation issues, and work issues too!

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### 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](#).



# 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](http://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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