

24 March 2020

To Our Dedicated Team Members,

The world is facing a unique set of circumstances that are rapidly changing our regular way of life.

We understand that the next six months will be a critical time for the world to combat the effects of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and may be a difficult time for many.

As of today's date, various state governments have put in place a shutdown of non-essential services to slow down the spread of the COVID-19 virus. This may mean a disruption to the normal way of business for us, and we are preparing for various scenarios, to ensure both the safety of our team is preserved, and we do our best to minimise the financial hardship experienced as a result of further shutdowns.

These are unprecedented circumstances, and many of you may be feeling a level of anxiety over your health and financial well-being.

We have put a pack together for you with various information that may enable you to help support you and your family at these difficult times.

If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact me via email [people@accessgroupsolutions.com.au](mailto:people@accessgroupsolutions.com.au).

**Please note our 24 Hour Affected Employee Hotline is 1300 888 247**

Please be patient and kind with one another and remember that a little kindness goes a long way.

Warm Regards,



**Aimee Khoury**  
People & Culture

### **Acknowledgement of Country**

Access Group Solutions acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands in which our business operates. We pay our respects to First Nationals Elders, past, present and emerging.



## **COMMUNICATION CHANNELS**

### **Communications within Access Group Solutions**

The Pandemic Manager for Access Group Solutions is Jason Raj, General Manager.

Authorised communications will be distributed jointly by Jason Raj and Aimee Khoury.

For any further information, or questions surrounding the information provided in this document, please email [people@accessgroupsolutions.com.au](mailto:people@accessgroupsolutions.com.au)

### **Interpreting Services**

#### **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)**

PH: 131 450

### **Hearing and Speech Impairment Services**

#### **National Relay Service**

If you have a hearing or speech impairment, you can contact all outside organisations via the National Relay Service

PH: 1800 555 660 (TTY 1800 555 630)

[www.relayservice.gov.au](http://www.relayservice.gov.au)

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**Note: The content of this publication is for general information only. It may not be applicable to you and does not constitute legal or financial advice. You should seek advice before acting or relying on any content contained within. All information provided is readily available online through the links provided.**

## SUPPLEMENT PACKAGES & FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

On the 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the Australian Government announced an initial Economic Response to the Coronavirus pandemic and have since announced further supplementary stimulus packages for people already receiving some government income payments. As at the issue of this letter, there are a few financial assistance packages to assist those affected by COVID-19.

### Income Support for Individuals

#### Coronavirus Supplement

For the next six months, the government will provide an additional payment for those eligible for income support.

#### **Who is it for? Those who are eligible to receive:**

- Jobseeker payments
- Sickness Allowance
- Youth Allowance Jobseeker Payments
- Parenting Payment (Partnered and Single)
- Farm Household Allowance
- Special Benefit recipients

#### **How much is this supplement?**

\$550.00 per fortnight, in addition to the regular payments received.

#### **When does it start?**

From the 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020, for six months.

If you already receive one of these income support benefits, you don't have to do anything – it will automatically be paid along with your payments commencing 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020. If you become eligible, you will need to lodge an application through the myGov website. Eligibility has been expanded to casual workers or contract workers with significantly reduced income as a result of COVID-19.

## Payments to Support Households

### Two Economic Support Payments

An economic support payment will be paid to eligible recipients who were eligible for their payment between 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and 13<sup>th</sup> April 2020 (inclusive).

#### **Who is it for?**

To be eligible for the first economic support payment, you must be residing in Australia and be receiving one of the following payments or hold one of the following concession cards:

- Age Pension
- Disability Support Pension
- Carer Payment
- Parenting Payment
- Wife Pension
- Widow B Pension
- ABSTUDY (Living Allowance)
- Austudy
- Bereavement Allowance
- Newstart Allowance
- Youth Allowance
- Partner Allowance
- Sickness Allowance
- Special Benefit
- Widow Allowance
- Family Tax Benefit, including Double Orphan Pension
- Carer Allowance
- Pensioner Concession Card holders
- Commonwealth Seniors Health Card holders
- Veteran Service Pension; Veteran Income Support Supplement; Veteran Compensation payments, including lump sum payments; War Widow(er) Pension and Veteran Payment
- DVA PCC holders; DVA Education Scheme recipients; Disability Pensioners at the temporary special rate; DVA Income support pensioners at \$0 rate
- Veteran Gold Card holders
- Farm Household Allowance

Eligibility for the second economic support payment is for the same group of people but only if they do not receive the Coronavirus Supplement with their payment.

If you are not currently receiving income support, but will be entitled to, given you have lost your job or have been stood down, are a casual or contract worker whose income has been reduced, or you are caring for someone affected by COVID-19, then you will need to apply through Centrelink through the myGov website.

You cannot access any entitlements such as sick or annual leave at the time of receiving income support payments. You also cannot access income protection insurance and receiving income support payments.

**How much is this economic support payment?**

\$750.00 for the first support payment, and a further \$750.00 for the second payment (if eligible).

**When does it start?**

The first payment will be made from 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020.

The second payment will be made from 13<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

**For more information, visit:**

Department of Social Services – an Overview of both Supplements

<https://www.dss.gov.au/about-the-department/coronavirus-information-and-support>

Services Australia – Coronavirus Supplement

<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/news/more-financial-support-coronavirus-affected-job-seekers>

Services Australia – Economic Support Payment

<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/news/750-one-economic-support-payment>

Financial Assistance Information – MoneySmart (ASIC)

<https://moneysmart.gov.au/covid-19-financial-assistance>

Attachments

Fact Sheet: Income Support for Individuals

Fact Sheet: Payments to Support Households

## Temporary Early Release of Superannuation

The government has announced it will allow individuals who may be affected by the COVID-19 virus the ability to have temporary early access to their superannuation.

Superannuation is usually only accessible upon retirement; however, the government understands that for those suffering significant financial difficulties as a result of COVID-19, there may be benefits to accessing some of your superannuation savings at this difficult time.

### Who can apply?

- If you are unemployed
- You are eligible to receive a job seeker, parenting, youth allowance or other related benefit
- On or after January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020:
  - You were made redundant
  - If your working hours have been reduced by 20% or more
  - If you are a sole trader with a suspended business

### What could you receive?

Eligible applicants will be able to apply to access up to \$10,000.00 of their superannuation before July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020. You do not have to access the full amount at that time.

A further \$10,000.00 can be accessed from July 1<sup>st</sup> onwards.

### How to apply

If you are eligible, you must apply directly through the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) via the myGov website. <https://my.gov.au/>

The ATO will process your application based upon your eligibility, and then provide the determination to your superannuation fund, who will make the payment to you without you having to apply to them directly.

To ensure you receive your funds as quickly as possible, confirm with your superannuation fund that your banking details are correct, and that you have provided adequate proof of identify.

### For more information, visit:

The Treasury  
<https://treasury.gov.au/coronavirus/households>

Attachments  
Fact Sheet: Temporary early release of superannuation

**Temporarily reducing Superannuation Minimum Drawdown Rates**, the government is helping retirees to manage the impact of financial markets on their retirement. The temporary reduction of minimum drawdown rates is mostly for retired individuals.

### **Reducing Social Security Deeming Rates**

The government is also reducing the upper and lower social security deeming rates by a further 0.25 percentage points.

**For more information, visit:**

Australian Tax Office (ATO)

<https://www.ato.gov.au/General/New-legislation/The-Australian-Government-s-Economic-Response-to-Coronavirus/#Temporarilyreducingsuperannuationminimum>

Attachments

Fact Sheet: Providing Support for Retirees

## SUPPORT IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

There are many avenues you can pursue for assistance if you come into serious financial hardship.

Financial hardship is when you may have difficulty making loan repayments, struggle to pay your tax, cannot pay credit card bills or have a large amount of debt to pay but insufficient funds to do so.

Financial hardship is nothing to be embarrassed about. Start conversations with professionals who can assist you in understanding your rights and responsibilities early. Financial hardship is often due to being able to afford a loan when obtained, but due to unforeseen circumstances, you are no longer able to service that loan. COVID-19 is one of those unforeseen circumstances – and it will place stress upon many households in Australia.

### Where you can go for assistance

#### 1. National Debt Helpline

The National Debt Hotline is a free service to help you get back on track with your finances. Full of helpful insights in how to manage debt, you can utilize the service to assist you in locating a Financial Counsellor in your area.

Note: The National Debt Helpline advises that you should never have to pay for a true Financial Counsellor – these are free services subsidized by the government or run by voluntary organizations. If you find an independent organization that you believe is a financial counselling service, but they want you to pay for that service, they are more than likely a debt consolidator or refinancing company which is not the same.

#### 2. Financial Counsellors

Financial Counsellors can walk you through the steps to get back on track with your finances and enable you to make good decisions about how to effectively deal with debt.

Financial Counselling is a free service who can:

- Suggest ways to improve your financial situation
- Talk to and negotiate with your creditors
- Help you apply for hardship variations
- Explain the risks involved with certain decisions
- Refer you to other services you may need i.e. legal services, crisis food and accommodation and health services

### 3. MoneySmart (ASIC)

MoneySmart is a key initiative under the National Financial Capability Strategy, that the Australian Securities and Investments Commission runs for Australians. Its purpose is to assist Australians make informed decisions about money, that leads to greater financial wellbeing.

They have a range of tools, tips and calculators to assist you to:

- Manage your money
- Reduce your debt
- Plan for your future
- Grow your wealth

MoneySmart also have a search tool to assist you in locating a Financial Counsellor or put you in touch with other financial services.

**For More Information on the National Debt Helpline, visit**

<https://ndh.org.au/>

Call: 1800 007 007

**For More information on Financial Counsellors, visit**

<https://ndh.org.au/talk-to-a-financial-counsellor/what-is-financial-counselling/>

Call: 1800 007 007

**For more information on Moneysmart, visit**

<https://moneysmart.gov.au/about-us>

<https://moneysmart.gov.au/managing-debt/financial-counselling>

## ASSISTANCE FROM YOUR FINANCIAL INSTITUTION

The Australian Banking Association is a good resource to help you get started in dealing with your financial institution.

If your financial circumstances have changed with the impact of COVID-19, there are practical ways your banking institution can assist. Australian banks have hardship teams that can provide you information and practical steps to enabling you to continue living through financial difficulties (depending on your financial institution and personal circumstances):

- Deferring home loan payments
- Waiving fees and charges
- Help with debt consolidation
- Waiving penalties for early withdrawal of a term deposit
- Deferring upcoming credit card payments and increasing emergency limits

It is important to let your bank know if you are experiencing financial hardship – the sooner they know, more options may be available to you.

### Important steps:

1. Assess your personal circumstances
2. Contact your bank
3. Provide information to your bank so they can make an assessment
4. Keep in communication with your bank and update them of any changes immediately

### What are your rights?

There are three key frameworks that govern how banks can provide hardship assistance to customers.

1. The National Credit Code (Schedule to the National Consumer Credit Protection Act 2009)
2. The Code of Banking Practice
3. The Australian Government's Hardship Principles

### For more information, visit

The Australian Banking Association

<https://www.ausbanking.org.au/campaigns/financial-hardship/>

## Popular Bank Information

**For all information pertaining to specific loan and hardship criteria, please contact the financial institution directly. This information is only a general guide as to what they currently claim to offer for their existing customers.**

### **ANZ**

<https://www.anz.com.au/promo/covid-19/>

- Existing standard variable home loan customers will have their home loan rate decreased by 0.15% 27 March 2020
- If you're paying more than the minimum, you can reduce it
- Pause your repayments for 6 months, with interest capitalised

### **Bank of Melbourne**

<https://www.bankofmelbourne.com.au/>

- Reduced fixed home loan rates available 27 March onwards (2.29%pa)
- Repayment relief for home loan customers – anyone who has lost their job or suffered a loss of income as a result of COVID-19 can contact BoM for a 3-month deferral on their home loan mortgage repayments with a further extension upon review
- Term deposit special offer for all Victorians with interest paid monthly
- Fill out the financial hardship application form
- <https://eforms.bankofmelbourne.com.au/olfmu/eforms/assist/#/welcome/applyNow>

### **Bank of Queensland**

<https://www.boq.com.au/>

- Defer mortgage and/or loan repayments
- Option to make interest only repayments
- Special arrangements in relation to arrears
- Early access to term deposit funds with waiver of redemption fees
- Waiver of other fees related to non-payment
- Fill out the financial hardship application form
- <https://www.boq.com.au/help-and-support/assistance>

### **Bendigo Bank**

<https://www.bendigobank.com.au/help/coronavirus-assistance-package/>

- Home loan customers can apply for relief on loans for up to six months
- Waiver of fees for the restructuring or consolidation of loans
- Discounted interest rates on new personal loans taken out by existing Bendigo bank customers
- Waiver of interest rate reduction for early withdrawals on term deposits prior to maturity
- Extend loan terms, reduce payments, tailor a payment arrangement for individuals
- Fill out the financial hardship application form

<https://www.bendigobank.com.au/help/financial-difficulty-assistance/>

### **Commonwealth Bank**

<https://www.commbank.com.au/latest/coronavirus.html>

- Defer your home loan repayments for up to 6 months (interest capitalised)
- Accessing any additional money in redraw
- Consider interest only payments
- Reduce payments to the minimum monthly repayment amount

### **NAB**

<https://www.nab.com.au/personal/customer-support/covid19-help>

- Home loan payment pause for up to 6 months (including a 3-month checkpoint, interest capitalised)
- Change your repayments
- Access redraw or your offset account if available

### **Newcastle Permanent**

<https://www.newcastlepermanent.com.au/supporting-you>

- Request a pause in repayments for up to 6 months, with interest capitalised, through the MemberAssist Program
- Apply for financial hardship through MemberAssist
- <https://www.newcastlepermanent.com.au/tools-and-services/help-and-support/member-assist>

### **Suncorp**

<https://www.suncorp.com.au/>

- Temporarily postpone loan repayments (interest capitalised)
- Extend period of loan contract and postpone or reduce the amount of repayments
- Offer short term solutions including waiving early withdrawal fees if you wish to withdraw from a term deposit
- Apply for financial hardship
- <https://www.suncorp.com.au/banking/covid19-information.html>

### **Westpac**

[https://www.westpac.com.au/help/disaster-relief/coronavirus/?pid=iwg:sc:COVID-&ttid=DCV\\_1947-TG-WBC-C-NA-CM-P:](https://www.westpac.com.au/help/disaster-relief/coronavirus/?pid=iwg:sc:COVID-&ttid=DCV_1947-TG-WBC-C-NA-CM-P:)

- Repayment relief for home loan customers, anyone who has lost their job or suffered a loss of income as a result of COVID-19 can contact them for a 3-month deferral on home loan, with an extension of a further 3 months after review (interest capitalised)
- Fill out the financial hardship application form  
<https://banking.westpac.com.au/olfmu/eforms/assist/#/welcome/applyNow>

## **Contacts**

The Australian Banking Association has also put together a list of contact details for Financial Hardship Teams at major Australian Banks.

### **For more information, visit:**

The Australian Banking Association

<https://www.ausbanking.org.au/campaigns/financial-hardship/>

Attachments

Financial Hardship Team Contact List

## KEEPING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH IN BALANCE

The COVID-19 pandemic is a unique situation that marks long months of vast uncertainty for many people. It is normal in uncertain times such as this, that you may be feeling some level of anxiety or stressed by the rapidly changing information.

It is important to stay informed, but it is also just as important to protect your mental wellbeing by ensuring the information doesn't overwhelm you or your loved ones.

Here are a few tips from Lifeline to assist you in minimizing the impact these feelings on your mental health:

- Minimize your exposure to media coverage
- Ensure you consult trusted sources of information
- Follow a 'calm yet cautious' approach
- Remain calm and be mindful not to contribute to widespread panic
- Show compassion and kindness to each other – isolation is difficult, but we can strengthen our communities by supporting each other
- Actively manage your wellbeing – get fresh air, eat nutritious foods, connect with friends and family via technology

Strategies to cope with social distancing, self-isolation or quarantine:

- Try to see this time as unique, not necessarily bad
- Get creative with the ways you connect with others
- Stay connected with your values
- Don't let fear and anxiety drive your interactions with other people
- Create or keep your daily routine with modifications
- Let your children know it's okay to share your emotions
- Include your children in your plans and acknowledge your own feelings

**For more information, visit:**

<https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

<https://www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/topics/mental-health-and-wellbeing-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

Call: 13 11 14

From Moneysmart (<https://moneysmart.gov.au/covid-19-be-moneysmart>)

- Protect yourself from scams
  - o Be wise with links you click into
  - o Be wary of opportunities that seem too good to be true
  - o Never give anyone your bank account details, tax file number or superannuation details
- Dealing with cancellations and refunds
  - o the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) provides up to date information on consumer rights
  - o if an event or travel plans are cancelled, you can check your rights in relation to COVID-19

From the ATO (<https://www.ato.gov.au/General/Financial-difficulties-and-serious-hardship/Individuals-with-financial-difficulties/>)

If you are experiencing financial difficulties, you may be eligible for:

- Priority processing of your tax return
- Release from payment of certain taxes/penalties
- More time to pay tax debt
- Tailored payment plans
- To have the tax withheld from your pay reduced for the rest of the financial year so you don't have to wait to get a refund when you lodge your tax return

## HEALTH REMINDERS

### Background

Of those who become infected with COVID-19, around 80% will experience only mild symptoms and fully recover without special treatment. Around 15% will experience moderate symptoms, and only a small number, approximately 5% may experience severe symptoms.

### Signs and Symptoms of COVID-19

- Fever
- Flu like symptoms like coughing, sore throat and fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Remember: not everyone who has symptoms like these has COVID-19, there are several other illnesses that can cause these symptoms

### High Risk Population Groups

- Older people
- Those with underlying medical conditions i.e. high blood pressure, diabetes, heart problems or respiratory diseases
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

### How does COVID-19 spread?

- Person to person through droplet transmission – i.e. when someone coughs or sneezes
- Droplets usually travel no further than 1 metre through the air
- You can become infected if an infected person coughs or sneezes and you are in close contact, if you touch an object that has been contaminated and you then touch your nose/mouth

### Stop the spread

- Wash your hands regularly
- Alternatively rub an alcohol-based sanitizer on your hands
- Avoid touching your face
- Maintain adequate social distancing (1.5m) away from other people)
- Avoid gatherings
- Use good respiratory hygiene
- Only wear a mask if you are sick with COVID-19 potential symptoms or caring for someone who has COVID-19
- Regularly clean and disinfect surfaces at work, home and in the car

### **What if I develop symptoms of COVID-19?**

- Stay at home and practice standard infection control precautions
- Seek medical advice, but call ahead first
- Go to [www.healthdirect.gov.au](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au)
- Call the National Coronavirus Information and Triage Line 1800 020 080
- Call your usual care provider
- Inform your workplace
- Stay informed via [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)

#### Resources:

The Australian Government Department of Health –

*Coronavirus (COVID19) Current Situation and Case Numbers*

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/coronavirus-covid-19-current-situation-and-case-numbers>