

Social Security – Newstart Allowance

Newstart Allowance is a Department of Human Services payment that provides financial help if you are looking for work. It can also provide support while you do activities that increase your chances of finding a job, such as studying or training.

How it works

To qualify for Newstart Allowance, you generally need to be:

- age 22 or older (but under Age Pension age);
- looking for paid work;
- prepared to enter into a Job Plan and meet activity-test requirements; and
- meet the income and assets tests.

You may have to serve some waiting periods before Newstart becomes payable. You will have to serve the Ordinary Waiting period of one week before you can start receiving Newstart Allowance. You may have to serve additional waiting periods if you have just finished a job (due to the income maintenance period) or you have certain levels of liquid assets (due to the liquid assets waiting period).

Other waiting periods may also apply if you don't meet work tests or move to an area with lower job prospects.

Job Plan

You need to have a Job Plan in order to get a Newstart Allowance. Your Job Plan outlines the things you have agreed to do to give you the best chance of getting a job. You will need to negotiate your Job Plan with the Department of Human Services or your Employment Services Provider. It will be reviewed regularly. Activities can include applying for jobs, undertaking a course or other types of study, or working part time. You are required to do the activities listed in your Job Plan in order to keep receiving the allowance.

Your activity requirements may be more flexible if you:

- are 55 years or older or
- are a principal carer, or
- have a medical condition

Residence requirements

The residency requirements generally require you to have been an Australian resident for at least 2 years but some exemptions apply. You must still be an Australian resident living in Australia when you lodge the claim.

Newstart Allowance payment rates

Payment rates increase every 20 March and 20 September. You should refer to the Department of Human Services website at www.humanservices.gov.au for the latest payment rates.

The amount you receive will depend on whether you are single, a member of a couple and/or have dependent children and is means tested. The income and assets tests are used to work out your payment rate. The test resulting in the lowest payment rate will apply.

Assets test

Under the assets test, the Department of Human Services generally uses the net market value of your assets which is the amount the asset can be sold for, less any debts that are secured against that asset. All assets owned by you and your spouse are assessed.

This includes most investment assets (such as shares, managed funds and investment properties), plus personal assets such as motor vehicles and home contents. Importantly, your family home is not included in the assets test. Other limited exemptions apply. Special assessment rules also apply if you have any involvement in a family trust or private company. Generally, your superannuation account balance is also exempt from the income and assets testing if it is in accumulation phase (and the account holder has not yet reached their Age Pension age).

The thresholds for the assets test can be found on the following website: www.humanservices.gov.au

If your assets exceed the thresholds that apply to your situation, you will not be entitled to any Newstart Allowance.

Income test

Income above \$104 and up to \$254 per fortnight reduces your fortnightly payment by 50 cents in the dollar and income above \$254 per fortnight reduces your payment by \$75 plus 60 cents in the dollar.

If you are a member of a couple, income earned by your partner in excess of the upper threshold also reduces your payment by 60 cents in the dollar. If your partner gets a payment from the Department of Human Services, your income may also affect the amount they get.

The thresholds for the income test can be found on the following website: www.humanservices.gov.au

If your income reaches the upper threshold, no Newstart Allowance is payable.

With some assets, such as a residential investment property, all of the net income (after allowable deductions) is counted under the income test. For other assets, 'deeming' applies.

Under deeming, an interest rate set by the government is applied to the balance of financial investments to "deem" the amount of income generated. The actual income derived is irrelevant. Financial investments include: bank accounts, shares, managed funds, superannuation held in accumulation after reaching Age Pension age, account-based pensions (unless grandfathered under deductible amount rules) and gifts that exceed the gifting thresholds.

If you have any involvement in a family trust or private company all of the income generated by that entity could be assessed as your income, depending on how the assets are assessed.

Health Care Card (HCC)

If you are eligible for Newstart Allowance, you will also be entitled to a Health Care Card (HCC) to help reduce your expenses.

The HCC gives you access to a range of discounted medical services funded by the government including cheaper prescription medicines through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) and some public transport discounts. Doctors may also bulk bill.

Benefits

If you are eligible for the Newstart Allowance, benefits may include:

- A regular income stream to improve your cash flow.

- Your assets may last longer, because the increased cash flow means you may have less need to draw on your personal investments.
- You will be entitled to a health care card to reduce the cost of some expenses (such as reduced cost medicines).

Risks, consequences and other important things to consider

These include:

- Newstart Allowance may be recalculated half-yearly or when your circumstances change.
- Newstart Allowance is taxable income however you may be entitled to tax offsets that will reduce some or all of the tax payable.
- Payments may be affected if you go overseas for extended periods of time. You should check details with the Department of Human Services before leaving the country.
- You are required to tell the Department of Human Services within 14 days about any change in your circumstances that may affect your payment.

Version: 1.10

Issue date: 15 October 2019

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