**Who misses out**

Brief on access to Australia’s safety net under Covid19

April 2020



Over one million people in Australia do not have access to income support (including Jobseeker Payment, Youth Allowance or Special Benefit) or the JobKeeper wage subsidy, despite having the right to work, study, or seek asylum. Many of these people cannot return to their ‘home’ country, for reasons ranging from being unable to get a flight, through to it being unsafe to do so. Many have established their lives here, working and raising families, and Australia is now home.

Below is a short table showing the key visa holders who are not covered by Centrelink payments (with limited exception) as well as those who cannot access the JobKeeper Payment, even if they work full or part time, or work casually and have been with the same employer for 12 months or more.

# Visa type and access to safety net

| **Visa type** | **Number** | **Access to income support?** | **Access to JobKeeper?**  | **Access to Medicare?** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Bridging visas (there are a variety of types). | 216,000 | No | No | Generally ineligible, unless initial substantive visa had such entitlements, or are on Bridging Visa E in some instances.  |
| Temporary Protection and Safe Haven Enterprise Visa | 16,500 | Yes, with some conditions (eg., some must have less than $5,000 to access Special Benefit). | No | Yes |
| International students | 565,000 | No. Some universities have offered assistance, but this is ad hoc. Also many international students are studying at institutions that are not providing assistance.  | No | No. Must have health insurance. Some students may have access to Medicare under reciprocal arrangements, but this may not cover pandemic-related treatment (United Kingdom, Sweden, Netherlands, Finland, Norway, Malta, Italy, Belgium, the Republic of Ireland & NZ). |
| Working holiday maker | 118,000 | No | No | Some may have access, including by reciprocal agreement as above. |
| Pacific and Seasonal Workers Visas | 7,000 | No | No | No. Must have health insurance, which may not cover pandemic treatment. |
| Temporary Resident (Other Employed) | 39,000 | No | No | Depends on subclass visa, otherwise need health insurance. |
| Temporary Resident (Skilled Employed)  | 139,000 | No | No | Possibly - depends on subclass of visa. |
| Temporary Graduate | 89,000 | No | No | No. Must have health insurance.  |
| New Zealand citizens |  | Yes if on a Special Category Visa (SCV) and arrived prior to 26 February 2001. SCV holders who arrived later are only eligible if they have lived in Australia without a break for at least ten years and have not access this payment for more than 6 months in past.  | Yes, but only if they hold Special Category (Subclass 444 Visa).  | Generally, yes if have been in Australia for more six or more months and have applied within six month of arriving to Australia |
| **People without current visa** | Approx. 60,000 | No | No |  No |

Sources: Australian Red Cross, 2020 & [Minister Alan Tudge media release 4 April 2020](https://minister.homeaffairs.gov.au/davidcoleman/Pages/Coronavirus-and-Temporary-Visa-holders.aspx)

# What government must do

Australia is in the midst of a public health crisis. It is essential that everyone in Australia has access to income support and healthcare to reduce the risk of Coronavirus being spread through the community.

## Income support recommendations:

Income support and wage subsidy access is critical to ensure people can keep a roof over their head and put food on the table. While emergency relief funding is welcome, it will not prevent people from losing their homes, thus being unable to self-isolate or cover the cost of essentials. It also potentially forces people to congregate at emergency relief centers, increasing the risk of infection.

1. The Australian Government must grant access to Jobseeker Payment and Special Benefit for people currently residing in Australia and who meet the income test.
2. All visa holders engaged in paid work should have access to JobKeeper Payment if they would otherwise qualify.

## Medicare recommendation

We note that some states and territories have put in place provisions for people who otherwise do not have Medicare access to receive free or subsidised healthcare. While this is welcome, the Commonwealth has a responsibility to ensure people have access to treatment during this pandemic, in the interests of public health.

In the context of COVID-19, everyone in the Australian community should be able to access free health screening, testing and treatment for COVID-19, regardless of their Medicare or visa status. People with significant health issues who have no Medicare, in particular people seeking asylum or whose health insurance coverage may be impacted as a result of COVID-19 should not be denied healthcare.