

Who misses out on access to Australia's safety net under Covid19

Briefing

21 April 2020

Summary

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 negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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.

Key priorities are:

- Extend access to income support and JobKeeper Payment to people without citizenship or permanent residency as soon as possible.
- Ensure everyone has access to Medicare to test for and treat COVID-19.

Briefing

There are more than one million people in Australia do not have access to income support, the JobKeeper wage subsidy or Medicare. 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.

Income support and wage subsidy access is critical to ensure people can keep a roof over their head and put food on the table.

Governments have provided emergency and food relief but this will not respond to the level of need, nor is it an effective way to provide income security for people throughout this crisis. Emergency and food relief will not prevent people from losing their homes, thus being unable to self-isolate or cover the cost of essentials. Self-isolation requirements also make the delivery of emergency and food relief particularly challenging as it can force people to congregate at emergency relief centers, increasing the risk of infection.

There is also a major concern about lack of access to healthcare for people not currently eligible for Medicare. 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.

Below is a short table showing the key visa holders who are not covered by Centrelink payments (with limited exception) or Medicare. It also includes 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 & access to income support, Medicare & JobKeeper

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](#)

Recommendations:

1. Grant access to **Jobseeker Payment and Special Benefit** for people currently residing in Australia and who meet the income test.
2. Grant access to **JobKeeper** Payment to all people on temporary visas if they would otherwise qualify.
3. Grant access to **Medicare** for all people living in Australia during the COVID-19 crisis.

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