

## 800,000 missing out on Disaster Payments

ACOSS is extremely concerned that people on the lowest incomes who are already struggling to survive are not able to access the COVID Disaster Payments. This gaping hole affects people on the lowest incomes in our communities, students, single mothers, parents, older women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with a disability and migrants. Many have children and others in their care.

ACOSS CEO Dr Cassandra Goldie said:

"People rely on social security to supplement their part-time or casual work and that paid work has disappeared overnight. It is heartless that they are barred from accessing Disaster Payments when their colleagues can.

There are two key issues of concern:

### 1) **No one receiving income support payments through Centrelink is able to access the Disaster Payments**

- Around 800,000 working-age people in lockdown in Victoria and Greater Sydney cannot access covid disaster payments because they receive JobSeeker, Youth Allowance or some other form of income support.
- In Victoria there are 418,000 people on income support payments (including JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, Parenting Payments)
- In Greater Sydney the number is 375,000.
- The maximum rate of JobSeeker Payment is \$315pw. Youth Allowance is \$256pw. Compared to the Disaster Payment of \$600/week for full time workers and \$375/week for people who worked 20hrs/week or less.
- Average rent in Greater Sydney for a unit is \$495pw.

### 2) **Many people in low paid work are receiving JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and Parenting Payment to make ends meet.**

- Latest data show **one in four people on these payments would have likely lost paid work because of the lockdowns**, including:
  - Two in five students
  - One in three single parents
  - One in five people on JobSeeker
- Someone can earn up to \$609pw (approx \$31,000pa) and access a \$1 or two of JobSeeker payment (so still be registered with Centrelink as a

JobSeeker recipient when they earn the majority of their income from casual or part-time work).

- More women earn income whilst receiving JobSeeker Payment than men: **29 per cent of women on JobSeeker reported earnings**, and 16 per cent of men.
- Youth Allowance (student) is designed for people to take up paid work with an income bank built into it.

Source: DSS JobSeeker Payment and Youth Allowance recipients – monthly profile May 2021 <https://data.gov.au/data/dataset/jobseeker-payment-and-youth-allowance-recipients-monthly-profile>

## STORIES

### Angela in Penrith in her 50s:

Angela helps her son raise his 4 year old daughter in their modest rental home in a suburb of Penrith. They pay \$460/week rent and are both on JobSeeker. In January Angela had finally secured 20 hours a week of casual work with a local hotel.

“It took me two and a half years to get this job – I can't tell you how good it was to get that job. I was bringing home \$1100/fortnight working 20hrs/week as a casual, but I was still on a small amount of JobSeeker. Even on the full rate of JobSeeker I have \$250/week less to contribute to the family expenses. When you're living from one paycheck to the next, it's a huge loss of income. It's really scary.

### Aneesa, Granville

“On JobSeeker, I have lost well over 20 hours of casual and contract work as a tutor and educator due to the lockdown.” Aneesa will find it difficult to make ends meet – “Literally everything is unaffordable: Rent, bills (including phone bill), food, winter clothing, specialist medical care and medication just to name a few.”

### Zoe, Coogee

On Youth Allowance or AusStudy

“I've been working at a pub which has shut, this has happened so often over the last year I've moved often to find another more stable job. Even with small signs of cases before the lockdowns happen, shifts get cut because not enough people will come to the pub. So I've been losing money all year. I'm on student allowance which only just will cover my rent, but it's frustrating knowing how unstable I feel, and how I've lost so much work, paying off uni, paying rent, yet still not able to qualify for the Disaster Payment. It's infuriating seeing friends of mine who work 1 shift a week normally who are eligible yet I'll get half the amount they do. There should be a solution if this lockdown is being extended. I know too many students living week to week

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