

Communique to Community Housing Providers and Contract Managers - COVID-19

Housing and Homelessness COVID-19 Further Economic Stimulus Payments and Income Assessments

The Federal Government released a second package of measures on 22 March 2020 to support the community and economy in response to COVID-19.

The **first package** of measures was released on 12 March 2020 and included a \$750 one-off payment for individuals and households receiving an eligible government. Payments will be made from 31 March 2020 on a progressive basis.

The **second package** provides several new one-off payments, an additional Coronavirus supplement of \$550 per fortnight and early access to Superannuation for our customers that will, in effect, increase their income.

These payments are considered non-assessable for the purposes of determining social housing eligibility, private housing eligibility and rent calculation for Public Housing and Community Housing rent policies.

Services Australia has advised that the economic stimulus payments are not expected to appear on customers' income statements.

The deeming rate used by the department will also be updated to align with Services Australia's lower deeming rate reduction to 0.5% from 1 May 2020.

The payments to date include:

- Two separate \$750 payments to social security, veteran and other income support recipients and eligible concession card holders, with payments to be made from 31 March and 13 July 2020.
- An additional Coronavirus supplement of \$550 per fortnight to be paid to income support payment recipients of JobSeeker Payment, Youth Allowance, Parenting Payment, Farm Household Allowance and Special Benefits Payment from 27 April 2020 for the next six months (up to September 2020).
- Ability for some customers to apply for early release of \$10,000 from superannuation funds in each of the 2019-20 and 2020-21 financial years, based on Centrelink established criteria. Any superannuation drawn down from funds in this manner is to be treated as non-assessable income for social and affordable housing eligibility and rent payments.

Community Housing

Community housing rent policy is made up of a range of different rent setting arrangements based on the type of property. The additional payments are to be treated as non-assessable incomes for all rent setting models within the Community Housing Rent Policy. This includes rents in crisis accommodation (where rent is being charged), long term community housing, transitional housing (including fully furnished transitional housing), affordable housing, and the supportive housing programs.

Please note: There is no need for changes to be made to the Community Housing Rent Calculator at this time to accommodate these changes. The incomes are non-assessable so should just not be included in any rent assessments that are being done using the department's rent calculator.



National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS)

For Community Housing Providers that are also NRAS Approved Participants or Property and Tenancy Managers, please note that income eligibility for NRAS is set by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services. Clarification is being sought from the Department of Social Services regarding the assessment and application of the stimulus payments. Please refer to dss.gov.au website for updated eligibility information.

For more information

About funding

- Funded service providers should direct any questions in relation to the allocation and expenditure of these funds to their usual Contract Manager in the department.
- If your organisation identifies any anticipated issues or risks in ensuring continuity of service, please notify the department immediately.

About assistance to your clients

- Should you have any people presenting who require **assistance**, please contact the Community Recovery Hotline on 1800 173 349 or online at www.qld.gov.au/community/disasters-emergencies/queensland-disasters/novel-coronavirus-covid-19.
- If you become aware of a staff member or client with a **confirmed case** of COVID-19, please follow Queensland Health advice available at health.qld.gov.au/coronavirus or call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84).
- Please remember to check the Queensland Health website frequently for **accurate information** about the COVID 19 virus in Queensland and what you can do to prevent transmission and minimise service impacts. We encourage your organisations to regularly disseminate this information to your staff and clients.

About Australian Government directions

Check the Australian Government's website - <https://www.australia.gov.au/> - for the latest COVID-19 news, updates and advice from Australian Government agencies.

Thank you again for your ongoing support and efforts as we work together to respond to COVID-19 in Queensland

The safety and wellbeing of sector staff, clients, and the wider community is our highest priority.

The department recognises that the COVID-19 situation is emerging and evolving rapidly. Officers have been looking at systems, operations and business continuity plans to ensure we can continue to meet the needs of our customers and maintain business as usual with the outbreak of COVID-19 here in Queensland.

Service continuity is vital, and we will work together as a broad sector, to meet any challenges.

The department encourages all Queenslanders to follow the direction of Queensland Health when considering which steps to take to protect their health and safety.
