

Friday 30 July 2021

Centrelink workers are bearing the brunt of administering new, complicated disaster payments

Centrelink workers are dealing with serious occupational health and safety issues as they work tirelessly to administer payments under the Morrison Government's new, complicated disaster payment system.

Queues at Centrelink offices around the country have not slowed down, making public health orders to socially distance impossible to enforce.

Last year, during the peak of the pandemic, Services Australia allowed for parts of the application process – such as apply for a new customer reference number, and uploading ID – to be done electronically, in order to respect public health orders and protect the community

This year, Centrelink workers do not have the same support in place for many of the claims they are processing. Many of the claims being processed would have been covered by JobKeeper last year. Workers at Centrelink have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to ensure that Australian workers and people receiving benefits have support. They have been at the frontline of the crisis since the beginning, as the community need for social security surged.

Last week Services Australia had its busiest day on record, it has processed over 950,000 claims and delivered over \$490 million in COVID-19 Disaster Payments to support those impacted by the latest lockdowns. But it currently has fewer permanent staff than it had before the pandemic.

The ACTU and CPSU call upon the Morrison Government to allow for elements of the application process to once again be completed electronically, re-introduce JobKeeper 2, and help keep communities and workers safe.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O'Neil,

“Centrelink workers have been there to support Australians through some of the most difficult times of this pandemic, and it's the least that the Federal Government can do to support them.

“Making portions of the disaster payment application process available online - as it was for JobSeeker last year - will help avoid congestion, make it easier to comply with social distancing health orders, and take unnecessary strain off our Centrelink workers.”

Quotes attributable to CPSU National Secretary Melissa Donnelly,

“NSW has been in lockdown for over 4 weeks, and the government has failed to act to ensure all of the community can access Services Australia remotely and quickly. NSW needs to beat this virus and forcing people into queues will not do that.”

“Having large parts of our community front up to Centrelink in person is dangerous to workplaces and our community, and forcing visa holders on to phone calls for hours and completing multiple claims is slowing down processes.

“Centrelink and Service Australia staff have been working longer and harder through this pandemic to help the community, but the government must be willing to work just as hard.”

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