

“ If you have viral hepatitis, you may be **eligible for financial and domestic assistance**, depending on how much hepatitis impacts on your daily life



Viral hepatitis and treatment can affect your career, education, relationships and in some cases, ability to care for yourself. **Centrelink social workers** are able to work with individuals, families and communities to assist in finding solutions during times of major change, such as during loss of income. They can offer short-term counselling and support and give you information on other services in the community such as health, legal services, housing assistance and support groups.

Job Services Australia is a national network of organisations dedicated to helping people find and sustain employment. It works with organisations such as the **Disability Employment Service**, which offers specialised employment help for people with a disability, injury or illness.

Disability Support Pension (DSP)

- To be eligible for the DSP, you must have a permanent disability that affects your ability to work for the next two years;

- This does not include 'episodes' or 'fluctuations';
- You must not be able to work more than 15 hours per week;
- The DSP is income and asset-tested;
- The more detail and supporting evidence your doctor provides; the better. If you experience times when you cannot get out of bed or go to work, then you need to tell this to your doctor so they can tell Centrelink how much hepatitis affects your daily life.

Sickness Allowance

- Sometimes you may feel so sick on treatment that you need to take time off work or study temporarily;
- As long as you have a job or fulltime study to return to, you may be eligible for 'sickness allowance' if you are 21 and over;
- People receiving ABSTUDY (over 25) or Austudy (over 21) are also eligible;
- Your doctor will need to provide a medical certificate to Centrelink;
- If you don't have a job or study to return to, you may qualify for the Newstart Allowance. If you are on Newstart and temporarily unable to look for work because of your medical condition, you may be eligible for an exemption if you provide a medical certificate from your doctor.

Carer Allowance and Payment

If you are providing constant care for a person with a disability, you may be eligible for the 'carer payment'. 'Care' does not necessarily mean hard labour around the home; it can be as simple as emotional support, washing dishes, helping with shopping, etc. Children, neighbours, friends and parents are also eligible – i.e. anyone who is a carer. You cannot claim the carer payment while also claiming another income support payment,

excepting the Carer Allowance (see below) or Family Tax Benefit.

There is also a smaller 'carer allowance' which is a supplement paid to carers. The payment is not asset or income-tested and is tax-free. Partners and family members of people with viral hepatitis may be eligible for a carer allowance.

How can I test my Eligibility?

To access support such as the DSP and Sickness Allowance, you will need to go through a Job Capacity Assessment (*see below*) – most of these are done face-to-face at your local Centrelink office. The more evidence and information you can provide; the better. **If you are on treatment, keep a copy of your treatment consent form**, as it outlines the length of six or 12 months of combination therapy plus side effects and has the signatures of the specialist, registrar and patient for verification.

People can obtain written information from the Hepatitis Council of Qld to add to their claim application, such as treatment side effects. Also keep in mind the consumer information inside every Pegasys/Pegatron packet that clearly explains treatment side effects.

Job Capacity Assessment

A Job Capacity Assessment (JCA) is an assessment of your ability to work. Job Capacity assessors will often refer people with disabilities to employment and support services, such as the Disability Employment Service, or Job Services Australia.

Having a JCA may give you more flexibility and support when on treatment and dealing with potential side effects. If you are experiencing other issues that are impacting on your ability to work

this assessment may also be able to provide support and assistance for your particular needs.

After you have completed a JCA, the types of support you are eligible for depend on what 'stream' you are placed in:

- Stream services 1 assist people with writing a resume, accessing jobs and enrolling in training courses;
- Stream services 2, 3 and 4 offer the same as in 1, plus more intensive help to overcome any employment barriers.

Contact your local Centrelink office to book for an assessment.

What if English isn't my first language?

Centrelink provides interpreters at no cost, and they also provide a free translation service for customer documents. Interpreters are covered by a Code of Ethics, which means any information you give them has to remain confidential.

Bilingual staff may be available in some Centrelink Customer Service Centers to help with brief questions. If an interpreter is not there, then staff will use the telephone interpreter service instead.

To speak to an interpreter call Centrelink Multilingual on **131 202**.

Interested in finding out more?

Centrelink contact numbers:

- To speak to a social worker: call **131 021**
- About disability, sickness and carer payments: call **132 717**
- Centrelink website: www.centrelink.gov.au
- Job Services Australia website: www.deewr.gov.au
- About a Job Capacity Assessment: call **1300 136 526**