
What's the law? – Centrelink

Presenter's notes

How to use these notes

Topic: Rights and responsibilities regarding Centrelink payments and services.

Resources: *What's the law?* free online resource 'Centrelink', which contains a photo story, activity sheets and answer sheets.

These notes provide guidelines for a presenter's script and information on how to use these resources when presenting to a community group. The notes include a story summary, questions and answers, key messages, areas for further discussion and referral information.

Preparing to present

It may be useful to read the activity and answer sheets to prepare for your presentation – they may give you ideas for additional questions and activities for your group. It is also a good idea to look at the websites and referral information provided under 'Possible discussion points and referral information' below.

If you need assistance with presentation skills, engagement ideas or coordination support for the group you are preparing for you can contact cle@legalaid.wa.gov.au or (08) 9261 6500.

Introduce yourself and *What's the law?*

Before you begin your presentation, introduce yourself, your role and your organisation.

For example, if you work at Legal Aid WA:

- Legal Aid WA helps the community in many different ways if they have problems with the law. We provide legal education to newly-arrived communities about their rights and responsibilities.

Refer to the *What's the law?* free online resource and its purpose by mentioning these key points:

- We see many different newly-arrived communities get into trouble with the law and often it is the same legal problems that arise. These legal troubles can be avoided if you know some simple information about the law and where to go to for help before your problem becomes serious.
- The photo stories in *What's the law* have been made to help you learn about the law on thirteen different topics.

Begin with some introductory statements and general questions about the topic:

- Today we are going to show you a photo story about why it is important to tell Centrelink about changes in how much money you earn, your living and study arrangements, relationship status or if you leave Australia.
- Centrelink problems can be complicated so it's important that you get legal advice, especially if you're asked to pay back money.
- Has anyone filled out a Centrelink form? Was it difficult? Did anyone help with the forms?

Summarise the photo story

- This story is about some problems Win Aung has with Centrelink payments.
- Win Aung starts working more, gets married and starts living with his wife. These changes have an impact on his Centrelink payments.
- Centrelink sends him a letter saying that he needs to pay Centrelink \$2000.

Ask questions

To strengthen engagement with the photo story and develop the group's legal literacy, ask key questions before showing the story. This will encourage the group to watch actively and think about key messages.

While you are watching the photo story think about the next three questions:

What should Win Aung do when his circumstances change?

What could happen if you don't tell Centrelink about changes in your life?

What can you do if you disagree with a decision Centrelink makes about your payments?

Show the photo story



Answer the questions

Ask the same key questions after you show the story and allow for discussion to tease out the right answers.

What should Win Aung do when his circumstances change?

- Win Aung must tell Centrelink if he earns more money or if any other important things change in his life.

What could happen if you don't tell Centrelink about changes in your life?

- Centrelink has many different ways they can find out about changes in your circumstances. For example, they can check with your employer or other government departments.
- If you don't tell Centrelink and you get more money, you may have to pay that money back.
- If you tell them incorrect information on purpose you may be charged with a criminal offence.
- If you don't understand something Centrelink tells you, ask for an interpreter.
- Do not ignore any letters from Centrelink.

What can you do if you disagree with a decision Centrelink makes about your payments?

- You can ask for the decision to be looked at again.
- Contact the **Welfare Rights and Advocacy Service** <http://www.wraswa.org.au/> of WA on **(08) 9328 1751**. This is a community legal centre offering assistance to Centrelink benefit recipients. Its website contains factsheets including about Centrelink debts, and appealing Centrelink decisions.

- Community legal centres are separate organisations from Centrelink. The information you tell community legal centre lawyers about your Centrelink problems will not be told to Centrelink.

Emphasise key messages

- Tell Centrelink about any changes in your life which affect your financial situation.
- If you don't understand something Centrelink tells you, ask for an interpreter. Do not ignore Centrelink letters.
- Call Welfare Rights and Advocacy Service of WA if you have legal problems or have to go to court.

Further questions and discussion

- Does anyone have any questions?

You are not expected to be a lawyer to use this resource. Many teachers and community workers use this resource successfully. If a participant raises personal legal issues, you can provide referral information. If you are not a lawyer, legal assessment or advice should be referred to the **Welfare Rights and Advocacy Service of WA** <http://www.wraswa.org.au/> on **(08) 9328 1751**, or for criminal matters, the **Legal Aid WA Infoline** on **1300 650 579** for information or referral.

Possible discussion points and referral information

Centrelink interviews /appointments

- If you have a problem with Centrelink and they ask you to go to an interview, you can get free legal advice before you go. Ask for an interpreter for the interview if you need one.
- Information on dealing with Centrelink: contact the **Welfare Rights and Advocacy Service of WA** <http://www.wraswa.org.au/> on **(08) 9328 1751**.

Reporting changes

- Tell **Centrelink** straight away when there are changes to: your pay, who you live with, where you live, your rent, child care, study, travel and other circumstances that affect your financial situation. **131 202** (Multilingual phone service): <http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/contact-us/>

Employment issues

- Other topics that may be raised are minimum wages, fair conditions and discrimination.
- Call **Wageline** a free confidential employment information service on **1300 655 266** or the **Fair Work Ombudsman** <http://www.fairwork.gov.au/> on **13 13 94** to find out about your workplace rights and responsibilities.
- Call the **Employment Law Centre (WA)** state-wide Advice Help Line: **1300 130 956** or **(08) 9227 0111** <https://elcwa.org.au/> Other referral services
- **Centrelink multilingual services** – 131 202. Translated material: www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/information-in-your-language/
- Visit the **National Welfare Rights Network** website at: <http://www.welfarerights.org.au/self-help-forms> for various self help forms.

Acknowledgement

Legal Aid WA would like to thank Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) for giving permission to reproduce and adapt the presenter's notes originally published by VLA for Western Australia.