A Guide to Disability Support Pension (Blind)

## A Guide to Standing Up For Your Rights



## About this guide

This self-advocacy information guide will help you understand the Disability Support Pension (Blind). It outlines:

* your responsibilities,
* what you are required to do to obtain the DSP (Blind),
* what evidence to provide during your application or review, and
* how to address obstacles in the application process

## Disclaimer

Every effort has been made to ensure the information in this guide is accurate at the time of release. However, it is not an official Centrelink document, and does not provide information which will always be applicable to individual circumstances. For information related to your individual circumstances, you will need to call Centrelink on 132 717.

At the time of review of this document, Centrelink now operates as Services Australia. Thus, telephone numbers and links related to Centrelink will reach Services Australia.

## A General Overview

There are two different types of disability support, the Disability Support Pension, and the Disability Support Pension (Blind). The Disability Support Pension (Blind) (DSP (Blind) provides financial support for people who are permanently blind (commonly known as ‘legally blind’). Make sure that you explain you are applying for the DSP (Blind) when you speak to Centrelink staff, and that the information they give you is for the correct support.

To be eligible for DSP (Blind) you must be aged between 16 years of age and the Age Pension age, and be assessed as permanently blind. Permanent blindness is a visual acuity after correction by suitable lenses of less than 6/60 in both eyes on the Snellen Scale, or 10 degrees or less field of vision. Alternatively, you may qualify if there are any other vision defects present, and their combined effect results in the same degree of vision impairment as either of the above.

From July 1, 2017, the qualifying age for Age Pension began to increase from 65 years to 65 years and six months. The qualifying age then increases by six months every two years, reaching 67 years by July 1, 2023. you will need to check with Centrelink whether you are under age pension age as it also depends on your year of birth.

If you are applying for DSP (Blind), you need to complete the application form, ‘Claim for Disability Support Pension’ (SA466). Make sure to choose ‘Yes’ at the question on the application asking ‘Are you claiming Disability Support Pension because you are permanently blind?’.

Be very careful to check the amount you will be paid. A couple, (whether married or not), both receiving the DSP (Blind), will receive the couple rate. A person receiving the DSP (Blind) who is in a relationship with a sighted person will receive half the couple rate, not the full single rate.

For other general details about the DSP (Blind), please contact Centrelink [or visit their website. here](https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/disability-support-pension).

## Assessment for the DSP (Blind)

A person whose medical evidence clearly indicates that they have permanent blindness is accepted as being manifestly eligible for DSP (Blind). The report from your ophthalmologist, or optometrist - with the supporting ophthalmologist’s details, (see below) is sufficient medical evidence to support your application. Under law, if you are considered manifestly eligible due to permanent blindness you are not required to take part in any other assessments.

## Supporting medical evidence

You need your ophthalmologist to complete a report that includes information about the diagnosis, treatment, symptoms, functional impact and prognosis of your vision. Your ophthalmologist needs to fill out [form SA-013](https://www.humanservices.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/sa013-1403en.pdf) to provide evidence of permanent blindness.

You can ask your optometrist to fill out this form instead. However, they need to provide details of your treating or formerly treating ophthalmologist, and clearly indicate the last referral they provided.

You do not need to provide any other medical evidence to satisfy the criteria for permanent blindness.

## Income and assets test

If you are claiming DSP (Blind), you do not need to fill out the separate income & assets form, as the DSP (Blind) is not income and assets tested. However, if you are also claiming rent assistance, you will need to fill out this form, as rent assistance is income tested.

If you have a partner, their income or assets do not affect your payment rates, unless they are claiming an income support payment from Centrelink (i.e. Newstart, aged pension, etc.). If your partner is also permanently blind, they do not need to declare income and assets unless they are also claiming rent assistance.

If you are single and receiving the full single rate of the DSP (Blind) and you enter a de facto relationship or marriage, your payments change and you will receive half of the married rate. If this occurs you have an obligation to inform Centrelink, or you may be overpaid and have a repayment debt to Centrelink.

## Job Capacity Assessment (JCA)

For people on or applying for the DSP (Blind), you do not need to be considered against the Continuing Inability to Work (CITW) criteria. This means you do not need to attend job-seeking activities or undergo a JCA.

If you have the DSP (Blind) or you are employed under the Supported Wage System or in an Australian Disability Enterprise, you do not need to attend interviews for job participation.

However, if you are accessing employment services to assist in looking for work, you may need to undergo a JCA. If you are a Vision Australia client with our employment services, we will help guide you through this process. You can ask for a referral to our employment services by calling **1300 847 466**.

## Indefinite Portability

Portability is the length of time you can leave Australia and still receive your payments. Under the DSP (Blind), basic portability is 28 days in a rolling twelve month period. Each 12 month period begins from your first day overseas.

If you are receiving the DSP (Blind), you can apply for indefinite portability of your payments as you are manifestly eligible. This means that your payments will continue if you need to travel overseas.

Permanent blindness under the DSP (Blind) qualifies you for indefinite portability if you are an Australian resident. This is not granted automatically, you need to apply for it. You should call Centrelink International Services on 131 673 to apply for Indefinite Portability.

However, while DSP (Blind) qualifies you for indefinite portability, applications are assessed on a case by case basis and you may need to undergo a portability assessment, as there are some other rules that may apply. If you were granted the DSP (Blind) before 2012, then you may still be manifestly eligible, but your information will be recorded under an older code and Centrelink may not have enough details to approve indefinite portability. In this case you should only need to provide a [report from your ophthalmologist](https://www.humanservices.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/sa013-1403en.pdf) updating your details. Once you have been advised that you have been granted “Indefinite Portability”, be sure to ask for written confirmation.

You must always notify Centrelink International Services of your intention to travel and when you return to Australia, in order to guarantee no interruption to your payments. You should speak with Centrelink to discuss your individual situation, as the current policy may change.

The obligation to report overseas travel applies whether or not you have been granted ‘indefinite portability’.

### Problem solving

## What if you are on DSP (Blind) and you are asked to undergo a job capacity assessment?

You should not be required to take part in a job capacity assessment if you are permanently blind because you are manifestly eligible for DSP (Blind) and exempt from the JCA requirements. The supporting report from your ophthalmologist is sufficient evidence to prove your manifest eligibility for DSP (Blind) and your continuing inability to work.

If you were granted DSP (Blind) before 2012 and your eligibility is under review, or if you are applying for indefinite portability, you may need to prove that you are permanently blind. This is because prior to 2012 your information will be recorded under an older code and DHS will not have enough details to confirm that you are permanently blind. In this case you only need to provide a new [report from your ophthalmologist](https://www.humanservices.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/sa013-1403en.pdf) updating your details.

If you are requested to undergo a JCA, you should explain that you are permanently blind and that you qualify as manifestly eligible: you should request that the support officer confirm these requirements – under law you are not required to take part in further assessments if you are manifestly eligible due to permanent blindness.

## What if I am under 35 and receiving DSP (Blind)?

If you are receiving the DSP (Blind), are permanently blind, and are under 35, the same requirements apply as if you were over 35. You should not be required to undergo any ‘compulsory activities’ for job-seeking participation.

If you are asked to take part in job-seeking activities or a program of support, you should explain as you are permanently blind, you qualify as manifestly eligible and request that the support officer confirm the requirements for **manifest eligibility**.

## The Disability Support (Blind) Pension and Income Tax

The DSP (blind) payments are tax-exempt income if you are under the Age Pension age, and once you are of Age Pension age then the DSP (Blind) becomes assessable income.

You should always check with a tax professional when preparing a tax return to be sure you are completing it correctly for your individual circumstances and the current rules.

## For Further Information

For any clarification of information in this guide or to obtain this guide in another format, call Vision Australia’s advocacy team on 1300 847 466 or send an email to [advocacy@visionaustralia.org](mailto:advocacy@visionaustralia.org)

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