

Robodebts

Helping the Welfare Rights Centre help its clients

1. Diagnosing a robodebt

- Ask the client:
 1. Received a Centrelink letter titled "Important Information about your employment income"?
 2. Told to go online to check/correct the income you declared to the ATO and dates you worked?
- If the answer is YES to either of these questions – your client has a robodebt.
- Debt may **increase** after an ARO has assessed documentation
- Refer to WRC for this advice

2. Helping clients with a robodebt

- Diagnose robodebt
- Send "Centrelink's Online Debt System" factsheet:
<http://www.nssrn.org.au/factsheets/>
(always download a fresh factsheet from NSSRN website)
- Assist client to:
 1. Find former employers to check work history of client no longer has the details
 2. Obtain the debt schedule from Centrelink – may need to do FOI.
 3. access computer, website to confirm/correct their details – liaise with community organization such as neighbourhood centres, migrant resource centres, local libraries, etc.
- Problems using online system?
 1. Complain to Centrelink 1800 123 468
 2. Not satisfied? Complain to Commonwealth Ombudsman 1800 123 468

3. What NOT to do

- DO NOT at first advise the client to appeal the debt to an Authorised Review Officer (ARO)

4. Referring clients to the Welfare Rights Centre

- Refer clients who still have debt after going through online process
- Ring WRC on 1800 226 028 Mondays and Wednesdays 9:30 am to 1:00 pm
- Vulnerable client?
 1. Obtain permission to disclose their information to WRC.
 2. Scan their documentation: Centrelink letters, pay slips etc.
 3. Email WRC sydney@welfarerights.org.au: attach documents, client contact info, size of debt, period of debt

5. How can CLCs help Welfare Rights Centre meet the demand?

- Simple advices in non-debt matters
- Where claim for Centrelink payment rejected, give appeal advice: 13 weeks to appeal to ARO from date of original decision
- If client off payment and has no source of income refer to WRC immediately.

6. Robodebts Senate inquiry

- Submissions due: 22 March 2017
- National Social Security Rights Network preparing submission
- What can CLCs do?
 1. Make their own submission
 2. Email NSSRN to express support for abolition of automated debt recovery: eo@nssrn.org.au (Matt Butt, Executive Officer)