

What do I need to think about before I leave prison?

Planning for what you need before you leave prison can help things go smoothly. While your first priority may be getting back to family and friends, in the first few weeks out you also need to look after yourself and your financial situation.

Managing your money can be a big challenge when you leave prison, even if you already have a house and family support. You may need access to money and other support to afford the things you will need to buy or spend money on after you leave. And it can be hectic organising all the things you need to have in place.

If you do as much preparation as you can before you get out, things will be easier.

How do I start planning my finances before I leave prison?

Depending on your circumstances, you may have a lot of one-off expenses in your first month such as transport costs; paying bond and rent in advance; paying for proof of identification; buying furniture, appliances and clothes; and more. So before you leave prison, there are some things that you can organise which will help make those first few weeks easier for you:

- discussing your circumstances with a Centrelink Prison Liaison Officer before you are released to arrange access to income and other supports;
- organising housing and accommodation;
- collecting proof of identification because you will need proof of your identity (ID) in order to do things like open a bank account, get a driver's licence, claim Centrelink payments or rent a house,;
- organising a health discharge plan, medication and prescriptions, referrals and appointments;
- arranging to get money from your prison account; and
- connecting with other services and support.

You should contact your bank to make sure your account is still open. If your account is suspended, you can reopen it. (Banks charge monthly fees so when you deposit money again, they will take out fees that haven't been paid while your account has been suspended). If it is closed, you will need to open a new account.

You can also start to organise support and practical assistance to help you with any debts, and with planning and budgeting, by organising a referral to a financial counsellor for immediately after you are released. See the section: *Who can I talk to about money as soon as I leave prison?*

What financial assistance and support can I access before I leave prison?

Centrelink

Centrelink may help you as you leave prison with income support payments and opportunities to look for work. You need to contact Centrelink, or arrange to talk with the Centrelink Prison Liaison Officer who visits the AMC, if you are scheduled for release - or directly after a court release.

The type of payment or assistance that you may be able to get will depend on your individual circumstances but you may be able to get paid an income support payment immediately, even if you are not already receiving a Centrelink payment. The Prison Liaison Officer will assist you to fill out a Prison Pre-release Claim and help you to claim a payment in advance. This will help make sure your payment is available to you upon your release.

You may also be eligible for a Crisis Payment is a one off payment to help people who have experienced difficult or extreme circumstances – eligibility includes having served at least 14 days in prison as a result of being charged with an offence and having just been released; and being in severe financial hardship. But you must submit your claim for Crisis Payment within 7 days after leaving the AMC.

If you can't make it to an office you should at least contact Centrelink by phone as your payments will normally be backdated to the first day you make contact.

Having trouble filling out forms?

Centrelink Prison Liaison Officers and services like the Coming Home Program can help you to better understand forms and fill them out correctly.

Throughcare

The Throughcare unit in the AMC offers support which will help link you to services and support following your release from the AMC - it offers support to *all* women, remanded or sentenced, exiting the AMC. The program identifies any support needs you may have such as income, housing and health, and helps to arrange necessary identification documentation and access to Centrelink payments. They also ensure that anyone leaving prison has transportation to their accommodation, and provide a My-Way bus card and release package, which includes essentials such as towels, crockery, cutlery, clothing and basic food staples.

The Throughcare Unit aims to start discussions up to three months prior to release, but if you have not been contacted and are nearing your release date, ask your Case Manager to connect you to the Unit.

The Coming Home Program

The Coming Home Program is a program specifically funded to provide case management, advocacy and accommodation for women leaving the AMC,

Women from the Coming Home Program visit the prison regularly. They can provide advice and help you organise appointments with services before you are released, and when you are due for release you can also talk to them about housing and transport. Sentenced women leaving prison are eligible for the Program's long term accommodation in ACT Housing properties and may also access transitional accommodation, if places are available.

The Coming Home Program

Phone: 02 6288 6904

Prisoner's Aid

Prisoner's Aid ACT (PA) is a not-for-profit agency that aims to assist people affected by the ACT Justice system – before, during or after imprisonment. PA staff can visit detainees prior to release to assess their needs and to provide information about community resources that are available on release. PA may assist with such things as obtaining birth certificates, retrieving personal property, transport to and from the AMC and advice about resources available under the Job Services Australia program. Further advice and information is available from the Manager of Prisoner's Aide - phone 6257 4866 (9 am to 12.30 pm), mobile 0450 960 896 or email paul.prisonersaid@gmail.com.