

**Volunteering and mutual obligation requirements for unemployment payment recipients**

***What are mutual obligation requirements and annual activity requirements?***

In return for receiving taxpayer-funded income support, unemployed people have mutual obligation requirements. As part of their mutual obligation requirements, job seekers may be required to undertake job search, attend employment services provider appointments, attend job interviews, and satisfy annual activity requirements.

The annual activity requirement forms part of a job seeker’s overall mutual obligation requirements. It only applies to job seekers in *jobactive* and refers to a requirement for them to undertake some additional activity, such as Work for the Dole, paid or voluntary work, study or training for six months of each year after their first year in *jobactive*. These activities are in addition to any other requirements that form part of a person’s overall mutual obligation requirements such as job search and attending provider appointments. Most job seekers have annual activity requirements which differ according to age and circumstance:

* those aged under 50 have 50 hours of annual activity requirements per fortnight (650 hours over 26 weeks);
* those aged 50-59 have 30 hours of annual activity requirements per fortnight (390 hours over 26 weeks);
* those aged 60 to below the age pension age have 10 hours of annual activity requirements per fortnight (130 hours over 26 weeks);
* those who have been assessed as having a partial capacity to work, or who are the principal carer of a child, have:
  + 30 hours per fortnight annual activity requirement if they are aged under 30;
  + 15-16 hours per fortnight annual activity requirement if they are aged 30-59;
  + no annual activity requirement if aged 60 or over.

There are also legislative provisions that relieve job seekers from any additional requirements because they are doing what is considered a sufficient level of activity for their circumstances. For example, people with a reduced capacity to work due to disability or primary carer of children have no further requirements if they undertake paid work for 15 hours per week. Job seekers who are aged 55 and over may also be taken to be fully meeting their mutual obligation requirements and have no further requirements if they are participating in approved combinations of paid and voluntary work for at least 30 hours per fortnight.

In summary, this means that people 55 and over can meet their requirements in two ways:

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| **Age** | **Can choose to fully meet requirements by:** | **OR must meet requirements by:** |
| 55-59 | Undertaking **30 hours per fortnight of a combination of volunteer or paid work**.  For first 12 months on payment, **at least 15 of the 30 hours must be in paid work**.  After 12 months on payment, can undertake any combination of volunteer and paid work.  People meeting requirements in this way do not have to look for work, attend regular provider appointments or undertake an annual activity requirement. | Looking for work (**up to 20 job searches** per month, as determined by provider); AND  Attending **regular appointments** with their employment services provider; AND  For six months each year after their first year on payment, undertaking an **annual activity requirement of 30 hours** **per fortnight of approved activities** (eg. work for the dole, training or voluntary work), in addition to doing their usual job search and attending provider appointments. |
| 60 to age pension age | Undertaking **30 hours per fortnight of** **any** **combination of volunteer or paid work**.  People meeting requirements in this way do not have to look for work, attend regular provider appointments or undertake an annual activity requirement. | Looking for work (**number of job searches depends on capacity**, as determined by provider); AND  Attending **regular appointments** with their employment services provider; AND  For six months each year after their first year on payment, undertaking an **annual activity requirement of** **10 hours** **per fortnight of approved activities** (eg. work for the dole, training or voluntary work), in addition to doing their usual job search and attending provider appointments. |

***How can volunteering be used to meet participation requirements for unemployment payment recipients?***

Volunteering can act as a valuable stepping stone into paid employment, where participants may gain important work-related skills and experience. For this reason, job seekers may count voluntary work towards their requirements if their provider considers the voluntary work to be beneficial in providing them with the necessary experience to help them into paid employment. Volunteer work is also an approved activity that may be counted towards job seekers’ annual activity requirement (see above).

In addition, those aged 55 and over can fully meet their requirements through 30 hours of approved combinations of paid and volunteer work. If job seekers meet their requirements in this way, they are considered to be fully meeting their requirements under provisions of social security law and do not have to undertake any additional requirements such as job search, attending provider appointments and annual activity requirements*.*

* For job seekers aged 55-59 during their first 12 months of payment, 15 of the 30 hours must be in paid work to fully meet their requirements in this way.
* For all other job seekers aged 55 and over, job seekers can fully meet their requirements through any combination of paid or volunteer work.

***Why can’t job seekers aged under 55 fully meet their requirements through volunteer work?***

The Government recognises that volunteering has a range of benefits for both the individual and the community, and job seekers aged under 55 may use volunteer work to contribute towards their requirements. However, participation in paid work and reduced reliance on income support should be the ultimate goal for job seekers.

***Why are there restrictions on the way a job seeker aged 55-59 years can participate in voluntary work to fully meet their mutual obligation requirements?***

Job seekers aged 55 to 59 can undertake in voluntary work as part of their requirements. However, to fully meet their requirements, in addition to their voluntary work, job seekers who are in their first 12 months on an unemployment payment will need to undertake either:

• at least 15 hours per fortnight of paid work, or

• other requirements such as job search, attending provider appointments and undertaking activities.

This recognises that the primary intent of unemployment payments is to support job seekers into paid work, where they are able.

***What if I am aged 55-59 and go off payment during my first 12 months on payment? Will I have to wait another 12 months before I can start fully meeting my requirements through 30 hours of voluntary work per fortnight?***

If you go off payment for a period of less than 3 months, for example because you find a temporary job, you will be taken to be still on payment during that period and it will count towards the 12 months. If you go off payment for more than 3 months, the 12 months period will start again if you come back on to payment.