

Getting started in Melbourne

A short guide from the Eritrean Community in Australia. It covers what to sort out first, and who to ask when you are stuck. Keep it — you will not need all of it in the first week.

In an emergency

Call 000 for police, ambulance or fire. Say the language you speak and they will get an interpreter. It is free from any phone, even with no credit.

If you are in crisis but not in immediate danger, Lifeline answers all night on 13 11 14.

The first two weeks

Work through these in roughly this order. None of them cost money to apply for.

- Tax File Number (TFN) — you cannot be paid properly without one. Free from the Australian Taxation Office.
- A bank account — take your passport and visa details. Ask if they have staff who speak your language; the bigger branches often do.
- An Australian SIM card — a local number makes everything else easier. Prepaid is fine to start.
- Medicare, if your visa entitles you to it. Ask us or Centrelink whether yours does.
- A Myki card — for trains, trams and buses. Buy one at any station or 7-Eleven, put money on it, and tap on AND tap off every trip. Forgetting to tap off can cost you the full fare.
- Register with a doctor (GP) near you, before you are sick rather than after. Ask whether they bulk bill — that means the visit is free.
- Enrol the children in school. Do this early; the school will help with the forms.
- English classes. Ask us what is running near you, and whether it has childcare.

Money, work and paperwork

Getting paid properly

There is a legal minimum wage in Australia and it applies to you. Being paid in cash below it is not allowed, and asking about your pay is normal — not rude. You should get a payslip, and have superannuation (retirement savings) paid on top of your wage.

If an employer says you need an ABN to do a job that looks like ordinary employment, be careful — that can be a way of paying you less than the law requires. Ask someone before you sign.

Short courses that open up work

Some jobs need a short certificate rather than a qualification — construction, forklift, security, food and alcohol service, first aid. They take a day or two. Ask us which ones are worth doing and where to do them cheaply.

Qualifications from home

Degrees and trades from Eritrea can often be recognised here, but the process takes time and usually costs money. Start it early, and talk to us first — the right path depends on the profession.

Do not guess at Centrelink or visa rules. What you are entitled to depends on your visa, and the rules change. Ask Centrelink directly, or ask us — we will help you find out and sit with you through the forms.

Health

- You are entitled to an interpreter at a hospital and at most GP clinics. Ask for one — it is free and it is normal.
- For something urgent that is not an emergency, ring Nurse-on-Call on 1300 60 60 24 for advice at any hour.
- Dental and mental health support exist and are often free or low cost. They are not obvious to find, so ask us.

Renting

- Photograph everything on the day you move in, including any damage, and keep the condition report.
- Your bond is your money. It is lodged with the state, not kept by the landlord, and you get it back if the place is in good order.
- Asking for a repair is a normal thing to do and cannot be held against you.
- If something feels wrong about an agreement — cash only, no paperwork, no receipts — ask us before signing.

Getting around and driving

- An overseas licence can sometimes be converted, and sometimes you must re-sit. Check with VicRoads which applies to you.
- Buying a car: check it is not written off or still under finance, get a roadworthy certificate, then transfer the registration — there is a deadline for the transfer, so do not leave it.
- Compulsory insurance is included in registration. It does NOT cover damage to your own car; that is separate.

When you do not know who to ask

Ask us. That is what we are here for, and no question is too small — we have all had to learn this from nothing. We can help with forms, ring somebody with you, or point you to the person who actually knows.

Eritrean Community in Australia

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First edition. This guide is being written by our community, and this is the short first version of it. Rules and services change, and some things differ depending on your visa — so treat this as a starting point and check anything important with us or the service itself. If something here is out of date, or you know something that should be in it, please tell us: that is how the next version gets better.