

Australian Government guide to Coronavirus

Compiled by Regional Development Australia, this guide attempts to round up information to a single useful source, but given this rapidly evolving issue it would be wise to follow the links to get the very latest information.

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The Australian Government's Economic Response to Coronavirus Part II

The Commonwealth Government has now released the second stage of its economic plan to cushion the economic impact of the coronavirus and help build a bridge to recovery. The notes here are from official sources in some cases extra information can be found through [Treasury](#) and/or business.gov.au

A total of \$189bn is being injected into the economy by all arms of Government in order to keep Australians in work and businesses in business.

This includes \$17.6bn for the Government's first economic package, \$90bn from the RBA and \$15bn from the Government to deliver easier access to finance, and \$66.1bn in the stage 2 package.

The economic support package includes:

- Support for households including casuals, sole-traders, retirees and those on income support
- Assistance for businesses to keep people in a job
- Regulatory protection and financial support for businesses to stay in business

[Economic response to Coronavirus](#) – how COVID-19 will impact the world and Australian economies

Coronavirus supplement

The Government is temporarily expanding eligibility to income support payments and establishing a new, time-limited Coronavirus supplement to be paid at a rate of \$550 per fortnight. This will be paid to both existing and new recipients of the JobSeeker Payment, Youth Allowance jobseeker, Parenting Payment, Farm Household Allowance and Special Benefit.

The Coronavirus supplement will be paid for the next 6 months. Eligible income support recipients will receive the full amount of the \$550 Coronavirus supplement on top of their payment each fortnight.

[Treasury factsheet](#) [Business link](#)

Payments to support households

In addition to the \$750 stimulus payment announced in the first round of measures, a further \$750 payment will be made to social security and veteran income support recipients and eligible concession card holders, except for those who are receive an income support payment that is eligible to receive the Coronavirus supplement.

This second payment will be made automatically from 13 July, while the first payment will be made from 31 March to people who receiving one of the eligible payments any time from 12 March to 13 April.

[Treasury factsheet](#)

Early release of superannuation

The Government will allow individuals in financial stress as a result of the Coronavirus to access up to \$10,000 of their superannuation in 2019-20 and a further \$10,000 in 2020-21.

Eligible individuals will be able to apply online through [myGov](#) for access of up to \$10,000 of their superannuation before 1 July. They will also be able to access up to a further \$10,000 through to the end of September. They will not need to pay tax on amounts released and the money they withdraw will not affect Centrelink or Veterans' Affairs payments.

[Treasury factsheet](#) [Business link](#)

Temporarily reduce superannuation minimum drawdown rates

The Government is temporarily reducing superannuation minimum drawdown requirements for account-based pensions and similar products by 50% for 2019-20 and 2020-21. This measure will benefit retirees by providing them with more flexibility as to how they manage their superannuation assets.

[Treasury factsheet](#)

Reducing social security deeming rates

On top of the deeming rate changes made at the time of the first package, the Government is reducing the deeming rates by a further 0.25 percentage points to reflect the latest rate reductions by the Reserve Bank of Australia.

As of 1 May 2020, the lower deeming rate will be 0.25% and the upper deeming rate will be 2.25%.

The change will benefit around 900,000 income support recipients, including Age Pensioners.

[Treasury factsheet](#)

Coronavirus SME Guarantee Scheme

The Commonwealth will establish the Coronavirus SME Guarantee Scheme which will support small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to get access to working capital to help them get them through the current crisis.

Under the Scheme, the Government will guarantee 50% of new loans issued by eligible lenders to SMEs. The Government will provide eligible lenders with a guarantee for unsecured loans with the following terms:

- SMEs, including sole traders, with a turnover of up to \$50m.
- Maximum total size of loans of \$250,000 per borrower.
- Loans will be up to three years, with an initial six-month repayment holiday.

[Treasury factsheet](#) [Business link](#)

Providing temporary relief for financially distressed businesses

The Government is temporarily increasing the threshold at which creditors can issue a statutory demand on a company which owes money, and the time companies have to respond.

The package also includes temporary relief for directors from any personal liability for trading while insolvent.

[Treasury factsheet](#)

Support for the aviation industry

As previously announced, the Government is also providing up to \$715m in support for Australian airlines and airports, which will ensure that our aviation sector receives timely cash flow support through an unprecedented period of disruption to international and domestic air travel.

WA Government support: One-off grants of \$17,500 to small and medium businesses

Small and medium businesses whose annual Australian Taxable Wages are between \$1m and \$4m will receive a one-off grant of \$17,500 to assist them to manage the impacts of COVID-19.

No applications are required. Grants will automatically be paid from July, but there may be delays for taxpayers whose tax status changed during the 2018-19 assessment period or who commenced as new employers in 2018-19 and 2019-20.

The Australian Government's Economic Response to Coronavirus Part I

The Commonwealth's first round of measures to help the economy withstand and recover from the economic impact of coronavirus will be administered by the Australian Tax Office.

The [business.gov.au](https://www.business.gov.au) weblink is especially useful

Enhancing the instant asset write-off

The government is increasing the instant asset write-off (IAWO) threshold from \$30,000 to \$150,000 and expanding access to include businesses with aggregated annual turnover of less than \$500m (up from \$50m).

Timing: This proposal applies 12 March to 30 June 2020, for new or second-hand assets first used, or installed ready for use in this timeframe. (Enhancing the IAWO will require legislative changes before it can take effect.)

[Treasury factsheet](#) [Business link](#)

Backing business incentive

The government is introducing a time limited 15-month investment incentive to support business investment and economic growth over the short-term, by accelerating depreciation deductions.

A deduction of 50% of the cost of an eligible asset on installation will apply, with existing depreciation rules applying to the balance of the asset's cost.

Eligibility: Businesses with aggregated turnover below \$500m.

Eligible assets: new assets that can be depreciated under Division 40 of the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997* (that is, plant, equipment and specified intangible assets, such as patents). Does not apply to second-hand Division 40 assets, or buildings and other capital works depreciable under Division 43.

Timing: Assets acquired after announcement and first used or installed by 30 June 2021.

[Business link](#)

Boosting Cash Flow for Employers (updated since initial announcement)

The Government is now providing up to \$100,000 to eligible small and medium sized businesses, and not-for-profits (including charities) that employ people, with a minimum payment of \$20,000.

On 12 March 2020, the Government announced the Boosting Cash Flow for Employers measure. The measure initially provided up to \$25,000 to business, with a minimum payment of \$2,000 for eligible businesses.

The Government has enhanced this measure as part of the second economic response package. Not-for-profit entities (NFPs), including charities, with aggregated annual turnover under \$50m and that employ workers will now also be eligible.

An additional payment is also being introduced in the July – October 2020 period. Eligible entities will receive an additional payment equal to the total of all of the Boosting Cash Flow for Employers payments they have received.

This means that eligible entities will receive at least \$20,000 up to a total of \$100,000 under both payments. This additional payment continues cash flow support over a longer period, increasing confidence, helping employers to retain staff and helping entities to keep operating.

The cash flow boost provides a tax free payment to employers and is automatically calculated by the Australian Taxation Office (ATO). There are no new forms required.

Eligibility: Small and medium business entities with aggregated annual turnover under \$50m and that employ workers will be eligible. Eligibility will generally be based on prior year turnover.

The payment will be delivered by the ATO as a credit in the activity statement system from 28 April 2020 when eligible businesses lodge (see below) upcoming activity statements.

Eligible businesses that withhold tax to the ATO on their employees' salary and wages will receive a payment equal to 100% of the amount withheld, up to a maximum payment of \$50,000.

Eligible businesses that pay salary and wages will receive a minimum payment of \$10,000, even if they are not required to withhold tax.

The payments will only be available to active eligible employers established prior to 12 March 2020. However, charities which are registered with the Australian Charities and Not for profits Commission will be eligible regardless of when they were registered, subject to meeting other eligibility requirements.

Timing: The Boosting Cash Flow will be applied for a limited number of activity statement lodgements. The ATO will deliver the payment as a credit to the business upon lodgement of their activity statements. Where this places the business in a refund position, the ATO will deliver the refund within 14 days.

Quarterly lodgers will be eligible to receive the payment for the quarters ending March 2020 and June 2020.

Monthly lodgers will be eligible to receive the payment for the March 2020, April 2020, May 2020 and June 2020 lodgements. To provide a similar treatment to quarterly lodgers, the payment for monthly lodgers will be calculated at three times the rate (300%) in the March 2020 activity statement. The minimum payment will be applied to the business' first lodgement.

The additional payment will be applied to a limited number of activity statement lodgements. The ATO will deliver the payment as a credit to businesses upon lodgement of activity statements. Where this places the business in a refund position, the ATO will deliver the refund within 14 days.

Quarterly lodgers will be eligible to receive the additional payment for the quarters ending June 2020 and September 2020. Each additional payment will be equal to half the initial Boosting Cash Flow for Employers payment (up to a total of \$50,000).

Monthly lodgers will be eligible to receive the additional payment for the June 2020, July 2020, August 2020 and September 2020 lodgements. Each additional payment will be equal to a quarter of total initial Boosting Cash Flow for Employers payment (up to a total of \$50,000).

[Treasury factsheet](#) [Business link](#)

Assistance for affected regions, communities and industries

The Government has set aside an initial \$1bn allocation to support those regions and communities that have been disproportionately affected by the economic impacts of the Coronavirus, including those heavily reliant on industries such as:

- tourism
- agriculture
- education

The \$1bn will be provided through existing or newly established Government programs.

This will include additional assistance to help businesses identify alternative export markets or supply chains. Targeted measures will also be developed to further promote domestic tourism.

Eligibility: The Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment will work with affected industries and communities to develop recovery plans and measures.

Timing: Funding will be available for distribution through existing or new mechanisms as soon as practicable.

[Treasury factsheet](#) [Business link](#)

Supporting apprentices and trainees

Businesses that employ an apprentice or trainee may be eligible for a wage subsidy of 50% of their wage paid from 1 January 2020 to 30 September 2020. You can register for the subsidy from early April 2020.

Where a small business is not able to retain an apprentice, the subsidy will be available to a new employer.

Employers will be reimbursed up to a maximum of \$21,000, per eligible apprentice or trainee (\$7,000 per quarter).

Support will also be provided to the [National Apprentice Employment Network](#), who are responsible for coordinating the re-employment of displaced apprentices and trainees throughout their network of host employers across Australia.

Eligibility: The subsidy will be available to small businesses employing fewer than 20 full-time employees who retain an apprentice or trainee.

Employers of any size and Group Training Organisations that re-engage an eligible out-of-trade apprentice or trainee will be eligible for the subsidy. The apprentice or trainee must have been in training with a small business as at 1 March 2020.

Employers will be able to access the subsidy after an eligibility assessment is undertaken by an Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN) provider.

Timing: Employers can register for the subsidy from early April 2020. Final claims for payment must be lodged by 31 December 2020.

For further information on how to apply for the subsidy, including information on eligibility, contact an [Australian Apprenticeship Support Network](#) (AASN) provider.

[Business link](#)

Coronavirus and Australian workplace laws

The Australian Government's Fair Work Ombudsman has created a host of information to guide workplace practices including what is enforceable, what obligations and entitlements do employers and employees have, plus a comprehensive suite of useful FAQs.

<https://www.fairwork.gov.au/>

Australian Tax Office

Support options

Businesses impacted by COVID-19 can call the ATO's Emergency Support Infoline on **1800 806 218** for specific help.

- If you prefer to speak in a language other than English, phone the Translating and Interpreting Service on 13 14 50 for help with your call.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can phone the Indigenous Helpline on 13 10 30.
- If you have difficulty hearing or speaking to people who use a phone, you can contact the ATO through the [National Relay Service](#).

You can also talk to your tax or BAS agent so they can work with the ATO to support you to manage your tax affairs.

Payment deferrals and remitting interest and penalties

If you have been affected by the coronavirus, the ATO can work with you to defer some payments and vary instalments you have due.

Where your business is affected by the coronavirus, the ATO will consider remitting interest and penalties applied to tax liabilities incurred after 23 January 2020.

Monthly GST credits

Businesses on a quarterly reporting cycle may elect to change their GST reporting and payment to monthly, to get quicker access to GST refunds you are entitled to.

Timing: You can only change from the start of a quarter, so a change now will take effect from 1 April 2020.

Pay as you go instalments

If you're a quarterly pay as you go (PAYG) instalments payer you can vary your PAYG instalments on your activity statement for the March 2020 quarter. You can do this by lodging a revised activity statement before your instalment is due and before you lodge your income tax return for the year.

Businesses that vary their PAYG instalment rate or amount can also claim a refund for any instalments made for the September 2019 and December 2019 quarters.

Coronavirus health alert

Department of Health

Updated 24.03.2020

Aim and status

Coronavirus is here. COVID-19 is a new disease, so there is no existing immunity in our community. This means that COVID-19 could spread widely and quickly. There is no treatment or cure. Antibiotics do not work on viruses.

The situation and confirmed cases are continually evolving. It is known that it took 67 days for the first 100,000 to be infected, 11 days for the next 100,000 and only four days for the third 100,000. The aim is to slow its progress so that medical services are not overwhelmed. This will save more lives.

Click [here](#) for the latest figures.

How it spreads

The virus can spread from person to person through:

- close contact with an infectious person (including in the 24 hours before they started showing symptoms)
- contact with droplets from an infected person's cough or sneeze
- touching objects or surfaces (like doorknobs or tables) that have cough or sneeze droplets from an infected person, and then touching your mouth or face

Protecting yourself and others

Good personal **hygiene** is key:

- cover coughs and sneezes with your elbow or a tissue and dispose of tissues properly
- wash your hands often with soap and water, including before and after eating and after going to the toilet
- use alcohol-based hand sanitisers
- clean and disinfect surfaces
- if you are sick, avoid contact with others and stay more than 1.5 metres away from people
- clean and sanitise frequently used objects such as mobiles, keys and wallets

Surgical masks

Surgical masks in the community are only helpful in preventing people who have coronavirus disease from spreading it to others.

If you are well, you do not need to wear a surgical mask unless self-isolating and you need to go into the public. There is little evidence that widespread use of surgical masks in healthy people prevents transmission in public.

Social distancing

One way to slow the spread of viruses is social distancing. There are practical things you can do, to protect those more susceptible to the virus.

General households:

- Practice good hand and cough/sneeze hygiene
- Avoid handshaking and other physical greetings
- Regularly clean shared high-touch surfaces, such as tables, kitchen benches and doorknobs
- Increase the amount of fresh air by opening windows or adjusting air conditioning
- Limit visits to the shop
- Consider what travel and outings are necessary, both individual and family, and go to open places such as parks

Social distancing in the workplace:

- Stay at home if you are sick
- Consider if gatherings can be rescheduled, staggered or cancelled
- Stop handshaking and other physical greetings
- Hold meetings via video conferencing or phone call
- Reconsider non-essential business travel
- Defer large face-to-face meetings
- Hold essential meetings outside in the open air if possible
- Promote good hand and cough/sneeze hygiene and provide hand sanitisers for all staff and workers
- Take lunch outside rather than in the lunch room
- Clean and disinfect shared high-touch surfaces regularly
- Consider opening windows and adjusting air conditioning for more fresh air
- Limit food handling and shared food in the workplace
- Promote strictest hygiene among food preparation (canteen) staff and their contacts

Home isolation

- Do not go to public places such as work, school, shopping centres, childcare or university
- ask someone to get food and other necessities for you and leave them at your front door
- do not let visitors in — only people who usually live with you should be in your home
- do not need to wear a mask in your home, but do wear one if you have to go out (for example to seek medical attention)
- maintain social contact stay in touch by phone and online with your family and friends

Who is most at risk

In Australia, the people most at risk of getting the virus are those who have:

- recently been overseas
- been in close contact with someone who has a confirmed case of COVID-19

Based on what we know about coronaviruses, those most at risk of serious infection are:

- people with compromised immune systems (such as people who have cancer)
- elderly people
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (as they have higher rates of chronic illness)
- people with chronic medical conditions
- people in group residential settings
- people in detention facilities
- To help protect people most at risk, we have recommended limits on public gatherings and visits to vulnerable groups.

Resources

[Department of Health](#)

[FAQs](#)