

NECA MEMBER COVID-19 UPDATE

LATEST FEDERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. NATIONAL STIMULUS PACKAGE UPDATE

\$1.3 Billion to support apprentices and trainees now available to small business

Wage subsidies for apprentices and trainees are now available.

The subsidy will initially cover 50 per cent of wages paid to apprentices between January to March this year and continue until 30 September 2020.

Wage subsidies will be available to small businesses, including those using a Group Training Organisation, to help retain existing apprentices and trainees. Employers of any size who re-engage an apprentice or trainee that has been displaced from a small business may also attract a wage subsidy.

Subsidies will cover wages paid from 1 January 2020 to 30 September 2020 and businesses will be reimbursed up to \$7,000 per quarter, up to a maximum of \$21,000, per eligible apprentice or trainee.

For more information on how to apply for the subsidy, including information on eligibility: www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/search-aasn

JobKeeper Payment Quick Employer Guide (Resource)

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) has created a *Brief Employer Guide to the new Federal Government JobKeeper wage subsidy*. This includes Employer Eligibility Criteria.

For more information: https://www.australianchamber.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/JobKeeper-Payment-Quick-Employer-Guide_310320_Final.pdf

2. COMERCIAL TENACIES UPDATE

National Cabinet has agreed that a mandatory code of conduct will be developed and subsequently legislated by State and Territory Governments to apply for tenancies where the tenant is eligible for the Commonwealth Government's JobKeeper assistance and is a small- or medium-sized enterprise (less than \$50 million turnover).

The principles that guide the code will be:

- (a) Where it can, rent should continue to be paid, and where there is financial distress as a result of COVID-19 (for example, the tenant is eligible for assistance through the JobKeeper program), tenants and landlords should negotiate a mutually agreed outcome
- (b) There will be a proportionality to rent reductions based on the decline in turnover to ensure that the burden is shared between landlords and tenants
- (c) There will be a prohibition on termination of leases for non-payment of rent (lockouts and eviction)
- (d) There will be a freeze on rent increases (except for turnover leases)
- (e) There will be a prohibition on penalties for tenants who stop trading or reduce opening hours
- (f) There will be a prohibition on landlords passing land tax to tenants (if not already legislated)
- (g) There will be a prohibition on landlords charging interest on unpaid rent
- (h) There will be a prohibition on landlords from making a claim to a bank guarantee or security deposit for non-payment of rent
- (i) Ensure that any legislative barriers or administrative hurdles to lease extensions are removed (so that a tenant and landlord could agree a rent waiver in return for a lease extension)

For landlords and tenants that sign up to the code of conduct, States and Territories have agreed to look at providing the equivalent of at least a three month land tax waiver and three month land tax deferral on application for eligible landowners, with jurisdictions to continue to monitor the situation.

Landlords must pass on the benefits to the tenants. In cases where parties have signed to the code of conduct, the ability for tenants to terminate leases as mentioned in the National Cabinet Statement on 29 March 2020 will not apply.

The proposed code of conduct will be discussed at the next meeting of the National Cabinet on Tuesday 7 April.

3. SAFE WORK AUSTRALIA RESOURCES

The model Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws require employers to take care of the health and safety of their workers and others at the workplace. This includes:

- providing and maintaining a work environment that is without risk to health and safety; and
- adequate facilities for workers in carrying out their work.

SafeWork Australia has published an update for the Building and Construction Industry: *Minimising the risk of exposure to COVID-19, 2 April 2020* that highlights what the industry must do to manage employee risks of exposure to COVID-19 in relation to:

- Physical distancing
- Health checks and quarantine
- Hygiene (environmental cleaning and worker hygiene)
- Deliveries and other contractors attending the workplace

- Keeping workers informed
- Consultation and communicating with workers

More information: <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/building-and-construction-minimising-risk-exposure-covid-19>

4. CORONAVIRUS AND TEMPORARY VISA HOLDERS

The Federal Government is making a number of changes to temporary visa holder arrangements during the coronavirus crisis in order to protect the health and livelihoods of Australians, support critical industries, and assist with the rapid recovery post the virus.

In line with changes being made for Australian citizens and permanent residents, most temporary visa holders with work rights will now be able to access their Australian superannuation to help support themselves during this crisis.

More information for visa holders: <https://covid19.homeaffairs.gov.au/temporary-visa-holders-frequently-asked-questions>

More information for businesses employing visa holders: <https://covid19.homeaffairs.gov.au/businesses-employing-visa-holders>

5. EDUCATION AND TRAINING UPDATE

Fast-tracking training and skills

A new sub-committee of the Australian Industry and Skills Committee (AISC) has been created to drive rapid and flexible development of training packages during the COVID-19 crisis.

Skills Ministers from all States and Territories agreed to priority national action to preserve the core capability in Australia's vocational education and training (VET) system and ensure its continued capacity to deliver critical skills.

Federal, State and Territory Skills Ministers agreed that protecting students and preserving the capacity of Australia's vocational education training system is a priority.

More information: <https://www.employment.gov.au/council-australian-governments-skills-council-COAG>

6. CORONAVIRUS SCAMS

The ACCC reports an increase in online and email scammers. Scammers are using COVID-19 to distract the recipient of emails. Please be vigilant and mindful that if something sounds too good to be true it probably is.

More information: <https://www.accc.gov.au/consumers/consumer-protection/protecting-yourself-from-scams>

LATEST STATE AND TERRITORY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Contact your local NECA Chapter website for regular updates.