



# RESEARCH PAPER

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## COVID-19 Australian Government roles and responsibilities: an overview

Research Branch

### Contents

Contributors.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Whole-of-government coordination measures .....	3
Agriculture, Water and the Environment .....	5
Attorney-General's.....	7
Defence .....	9
Education, Skills and Employment .....	10
Finance .....	12
Foreign Affairs and Trade .....	12
Health.....	15
Home Affairs.....	18
Industry, Science, Energy and Resources.....	20
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications .....	22
Prime Minister and Cabinet.....	24
Social Services.....	27
Treasury.....	28

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## Introduction

COVID-19 is the [name given \(on 11 February 2020\)](#) to the [disease caused by the novel coronavirus](#) 'severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2' (SARS-CoV-2) that originated in China's Hubei province in December 2019. It stands for 'coronavirus disease 2019' (CO-corona; VI-virus; D-disease 2019).

The [first confirmed case in Australia](#) was announced on 25 January 2020. On 30 January the World Health Organization (WHO) [declared the global outbreak to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern](#). On 27 February the [Australian Prime Minister announced the activation](#) of the [Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) in anticipation of the likelihood that the world would 'soon enter a pandemic phase'. On 1 March the Australian Government announced the [first COVID-19 related death in Australia](#), and on 2 March the [first confirmed case in Australia of 'community transmission'](#). On 11 March [the WHO declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic](#), the first caused by a coronavirus. At that time there were 118,000 cases and 4,291 deaths reported globally.

As at 18 May 2020 there were more than 4.6 million cases and just over 312,000 deaths [confirmed worldwide](#), and 7,060 cases and 99 deaths [confirmed in Australia](#).

The COVID-19 pandemic remains a constantly evolving situation and the Australian Government's response involves a diverse range of activities and measures undertaken by a variety of Australian Public Service departments and agencies.

This overview represents a snapshot of the COVID-19 related roles and responsibilities of these departments and agencies as at mid-May 2020 and is one of a range of [publications on COVID-19 by the Parliamentary Library](#). Note that discussion of portfolio agencies is limited to those with clearly defined responsibilities or an otherwise obvious role in the Government's COVID-19 response. While every effort has been made to identify COVID-19 related measures, it is possible that not all have been included. This overview should therefore not be treated as an exhaustive list.

## Whole-of-government coordination measures

The following Parliamentary Library quick guides, published at the end of April 2020, set out the policy and administrative arrangements relating to national emergencies, pandemics, and COVID-19 specifically.

- [National emergency and disaster response arrangements in Australia: a quick guide](#)
- [Australian pandemic response planning: a quick guide](#)
- [Australian COVID-19 response management arrangements: a quick guide](#)

## COVID-related units within departments

The [Australian Government Organisations Register](#) (AGOR) shows that a number of portfolio departments have set up COVID-related units:

- Most units are in the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
- Other units are in the Treasury, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and the Department of Education, Skills and Employment.

It appears AGOR is being updated weekly, so search results may change from time to time.

## ***National Cabinet***

On 13 March 2020 the Prime Minister announced that a new body called the [National Cabinet](#) had been established to ensure a '[coordinated response](#) across the country to the many issues that relate to the management of the coronavirus'. It comprises the Prime Minister and the leaders of the states/territories, and is advised by the [Australian Health Protection Principal Committee](#) (AHPPC). It [first met on 15 March](#) and meets at least weekly.

## ***National COVID-19 Coordination Commission***

On 25 March 2020 the [Prime Minister announced the formation of a new advisory body](#)—the [National COVID-19 Coordination Commission](#) (NCCC)—to be based in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and comprised of leaders from the profit and non-profit sectors.

The [NCCC Executive Board of Commissioners](#) includes Neville Power (Chair); David Thodey (Deputy Chair); Greg Combet; Jane Halton; Paul Little; and Catherine Tanna. They are joined by the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Philip Gaetjens, and the Secretary of the Department of Home Affairs, Mike Pezzullo. The CEO is Peter Harris and Andrew N. Liveris is Special Adviser to the Commission.

The function of the NCCC is to 'coordinate advice to the Australian Government on actions to anticipate and mitigate the economic and social effects of the global coronavirus pandemic'. [The NCCC](#):

... is about mobilising a whole-of-society and whole-of economy effort so we come through this unprecedented health crisis. The Commission will assist the Government to ensure all resources are marshalled to this vital task in a coordinated and effective manner.

The NCCC supports the decision-making committees managing the crisis including the National Cabinet, the National Security Committee of Cabinet and the Expenditure Review Committee of Cabinet.

The NCCC will work in tandem with the Chief Medical Officer. Two COVID-19 initiatives report to the NCCC:

- the Coronavirus Business Liaison Unit based in the Department of the Treasury and
- the National Coordination Mechanism based in the Department of Home Affairs, which, in consultation with the states and territories, coordinates whole-of-government responses to issues other than the direct health management of COVID-19.

Key COVID-19 related measures include:

- [forming a working group to work with manufacturers](#) 'to ensure supply of essential products, such as personal protection equipment, and solve supply chain issues to keep critical goods flowing to Australian communities', and 'provide advice on priority recommendations to government on future opportunities for manufacturing in Australia'
- [forming an Industrial Relations Working Group](#) 'to help as many businesses as possible to operate and keep their employees and customers safe through the COVID-19 crisis', and issuing a [checklist to assist businesses](#) in developing a plan 'to keep their workforce safe and virus free' and
- [creating an 'online planning tool](#) to help business develop a plan to keep their workers, customers and the community safe as they reopen or increase their activities in the weeks and months ahead' (announced on 8 May 2020).

## **Agriculture, Water and the Environment**

### **Leadership**

- Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management, David Littleproud
- Minister for the Environment, Sussan Ley
- Minister for Resources, Water and Northern Australia, Keith Pitt
- Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries, Jonathon Duniam
- Assistant Minister for Waste Reduction and Environmental Management, Trevor Evans
- Secretary of the Department, Andrew Metcalfe

### **COVID-19 taskforces**

- Agriculture Industry Engagement on COVID-19 Team: [Senior Agriculture Industry Engagement Officer](#), and supporting team of departmental officers, established as the key liaison between the Department and agriculture, fisheries and forestry stakeholders affected by COVID-19.

### **Key COVID-19 related roles**

- developed a dedicated [COVID-19 information hub](#) to simplify access to information and advice about the impacts of COVID-19 on agriculture, trade and the environment
- dedicated [staff deployed to import assessment, bookings and inspection functions](#) to enable faster border clearance of imported grocery items for supermarkets, some of which have experienced high demand during the COVID-19 pandemic
- implemented [temporary changes to visa arrangements](#) to allow seasonal farm workers (within the Pacific Labour Scheme, Seasonal Worker Program and working holiday makers) to continue to work in agriculture and food processing during the pandemic to secure Australia's food and produce supply during COVID-19
- [updating The Manual Of Importing Country Requirements](#) with any temporary requirements requested by importing trading partners for additional assurances for food and agricultural products as a result of the spread of COVID-19
- implemented temporary changes to certification requirements for [imported fresh produce, cut flowers, plants and other plant based commodities](#), and [imported animals, biological and animal-based goods](#), to allow electronic certificates to be used and
- undertaking regular [analysis of the agricultural trade implications of COVID-19](#), such as price changes, the role of imports in our food production, and changes to supply chain.

### **Portfolio agencies**

#### **Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Science**

- providing analysis of [Australia's food security during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) and
- produced research and report on the [impacts of COVID-19 on Australian agriculture, forestry and fisheries trade](#).

#### **AgriFutures Australia**

- arranging [variations to research projects](#) affected by COVID-19 restrictions.

### **Australian Chief Veterinary Officer**

- [negotiating with World Organisation for Animal Health member countries](#) to deliver global policy reforms to reduce the risks associated with wildlife markets.

### **Australian Fisheries Management Authority**

- providing [levy relief](#) by waiving or refunding Commonwealth fisheries and Torres Strait Prawn Fishery levies from 1 April to 31 December 2020 in response to the [impact of COVID-19 on the Australian fishing industry](#).

### **Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority**

- implementing [support and guidance to holders and manufacturers of veterinary medicines](#) to demonstrate compliance with Good Manufacturing Practice, while scheduled inspections and audits cannot take place due to COVID-19 social distancing measures and travel restrictions.

### **Cotton Research and Development Corporation**

- arranging [variations to research agreements](#) for research partners affected by COVID-19 restrictions.

### **Fisheries Research and Development Corporation**

- produced a special [COVID-19 edition of FISH magazine](#) providing an up to date source of relevant information from international, national, state and territory authorities and
- arranging [variations to contracted research projects and activities](#) affected by COVID-19 restrictions.

### **National Biosecurity Committee**

- issued Animal Health Committee [policy statement on COVID-19 diagnostic testing and surveillance in animals](#).

### **Parks Australia**

- enforcing the [closure of national parks](#), through cancelling camping bookings and [imposing fines](#) on any non-essential visitors in park areas and
- arranging to [waive or reimburse the cost of permits and licence fees](#) for commercial tourism businesses operating in Commonwealth National Parks [from 1 January 2020 to 31 March 2021](#) in response to the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism industry.

### **Wine Australia**

- providing [analysis of the Australian wine industry, trade and logistics](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Attorney-General's

### Leadership

- Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations, Christian Porter
- Secretary of the Department, Chris Moraitis

### Key COVID-19 related roles

- developed [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)—Frequently Asked Questions](#) and useful links webpage which provides information on the JobKeeper wage subsidy scheme; family issues; courts and legal issues and other issues such as privacy and human rights and
- developed draft legislation, the [Privacy Amendment \(Public Health Contact Information\) Bill 2020](#), to support the Government's COVIDSafe mobile phone contact tracing app and provide strong ongoing privacy protections. The legislation was [passed by Parliament on 14 May 2020](#).

### Portfolio agencies

#### Courts and tribunals

All courts and tribunals have modified practices in order to minimise in-person attendance on court or tribunal premises, with the priority being the health and safety of the community, and in particular, parties, practitioners, judges and staff, and the families of all of these groups. All court documents are to be filed electronically.

A key initiative is the [COVID-19 List](#) in the Family Court of Australia and the Federal Circuit Court of Australia. The list is dedicated to deal exclusively with urgent parenting-related disputes that have arisen due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These include matters relating to family violence, supervised contact, border restrictions and medical status. It applies to urgent family law applications filed in the Family Court of Australia and the Federal Circuit Court of Australia. The COVID-19 List commenced on 29 April 2020.

Various practice directions or updates have been issued by the courts that provide guidance on how the courts will operate during the COVID-19 pandemic: [High Court](#); [Federal Court](#); [Family Court](#); [Federal Circuit Court](#); [AAT](#).

#### Industrial relations

##### [Australian Building and Construction Commission](#)

- provides advice and assistance on implementing changes to the *Fair Work Act 2009* (FWA) to implement the operation of the JobKeeper wage subsidy
- provides advice to employers and employees in the building and construction industry with regard to leave entitlements; redundancy and termination of employment; employee stand-downs and
- assists with implementing the Fair Work Amendment (Variation of Enterprise Agreements) Regulations 2020, which temporarily reduce the period for proposed variations to enterprise agreements from seven days to one.

##### [Comcare](#)

- published a range of [guidance and advice on working from home](#) for employees working under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (WHS Act) and *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988* (SRC Act); employer and employee entitlements and responsibilities under the *Safety*,

*Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1998 (SRC Act) during COVID-19; and the mental health and wellbeing of workers.*

### Fair Work Commission

- developed the [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) updates & advice](#) on workplace entitlements and obligations
- processing applications to [vary awards and enterprise agreements](#) to allow for more flexibility during the COVID-19 pandemic; including varying 99 awards to provide unpaid pandemic leave and greater flexibility for annual leave for employees in many awards and
- administering temporary amendments to the FWA to help with implementing the JobKeeper payment scheme.

### Fair Work Ombudsman

- provides detailed information about the [JobKeeper wage subsidy scheme](#): overview, eligibility, how to apply and disputes and
- developed [Coronavirus and Australian workplace laws](#) webpage: helps employees, employers and the community to understand their rights and responsibilities at work during the coronavirus outbreak.

### Safe Work Australia

- promotes the [National COVID-19 Safe Workplace Principles](#) as agreed to by the National Cabinet and
- developing a nationally consistent work health and safety guidance for COVID-19, in accordance with the safe workplace principles.

## **Regulation and reform**

### Australian Financial Security Authority

- administers recent [changes to bankruptcy law](#) to provide immediate relief to people facing financial difficulty due to the economic impacts of the coronavirus and
- introduced [temporary debt relief](#): changes came into effect to support individuals and businesses. The measures include:
  - [six month temporary debt protection](#)
  - [changes to bankruptcy notices](#)
  - [impacts to people who are currently bankrupt.](#)

### Australian Human Rights Commission

- developed a range of [online resources aimed at children and teenagers](#) and the [gendered impact of COVID-19](#) and
- reported a spike in racial discrimination complaints and encourages people to report [coronavirus-fuelled racist attacks](#).

### Office of the Australian Information Commissioner

- published [COVID-19 privacy guidance](#) for organisations covered by the *Privacy Act 1988*, including Australian Government agencies and private sector employers



- convened a [National COVID-19 Privacy Team](#) to provide a coordinated response to personal information handling proposals with national implications
- published [freedom of information guidance](#) and
- signatory to the Australian and New Zealand Information Access Commissioners' [joint statement on COVID-19 and the duty to document](#), which acknowledges that 'with governments taking unprecedented steps to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic ... records may be at risk as new ways of working are rapidly adopted without the usual processes and infrastructure'.

## Defence

### **Leadership**

- Minister for Defence, Linda Reynolds
- Minister for Defence Personnel and Veterans' Affairs, Darren Chester
- Assistant Defence Minister, Alex Hawke
- Minister for Defence Industry, Melissa Price
- Secretary of the Department, Greg Moriarty
- Chief of the Defence Force, General Angus Campbell

### **COVID-19 taskforces**

Defence COVID-19 Taskforce, led by [Lieutenant General John Frewen](#)

Operation COVID-19 Assist, led by [Major General Paul Kenny](#)

Defence Rapid Response Group, led by [Chief Defence Scientist Tanya Monro](#)

### **Key COVID-19 related roles**

- The [Department of Defence's \(DoD\) contribution](#) to the whole-of-government response to COVID-19 is conducted under Defence Assistance to the Civil Community (DACC) arrangements.
- Since early February 2020 DoD has supplied clinical and epidemiological support to the [Department of Health National Incident Room](#).
- On 9 March 2020 the Defence COVID-19 Taskforce was established under the leadership of [Lieutenant General John Frewen](#). The taskforce was created to coordinate Defence's internal response to COVID-19 as well as support for whole-of-government activities.
- [Australian Defence Force \(ADF\) assistance to the COVID-19 response](#) was first announced on 17 March by the Minister for Defence and related to the provision of Army support to increase domestic manufacturing of medical personal protective equipment (PPE). A small team of around a dozen engineering maintenance specialists from the Army Logistic Training Centre and the Joint Logistics Unit in Victoria were deployed to Med-Con Pty Ltd to assist with this task.
- Military personnel have assisted with state/territory-based Reconnaissance and Planning Support Teams and Contact Tracing Support Teams.
- On 27 March Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced that [ADF personnel would assist state and federal enforcement agencies](#) with quarantine compliance checks.

- DoD provides support to Emergency Management Australia (EMA) planning for the [National Communicable Disease Incidence of National Significance Plan](#).
- ADF and Defence civilian personnel are [embedded in various federal government agencies](#), including logistics and specialist staff within the Department of Health and other expertise embedded within the Department of Home Affairs and Services Australia.
- [DoD also provided health, logistics and movements support](#) to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Australian Border Force in the repatriation and care of returning Australian nationals.
- The [ADF's COVID-19 assistance was extended on 1 April](#) under Operation COVID-19 Assist under the leadership of Major General Paul Kenny.
- On 14 April [DoD deployed ADF personnel to Tasmania](#) as part of an Australian Medical Assistance Team (AUSMAT) following a COVID-19 outbreak at the North West Regional Hospital in Burnie. This deployment concluded on 30 April 2020.
- On 16 April a [DoD-led Rapid Response Group was established](#) to investigate ways to increase domestic stocks of invasive ventilators. The group is led by [Chief Defence Scientist Professor Tanya Monro](#).
- On 22 April the Government announced that [Defence Science and Technology had designed new face shields](#) and was working with South Australian Defence industry company Axiom Precision Manufacturing to assist with rapid production.
- Under Operation COVID-19 Assist, the [ADF has deployed more than 2,000 personnel across Australia](#) to assist state and territory governments with COVID-19 related activities.

## Education, Skills and Employment

### **Leadership**

- Minister for Education, Dan Tehan
- Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, Michaelia Cash
- Assistant Minister for Vocational Education, Training and Apprenticeships, Steve Irons
- Minister Assisting the Minister for Trade and Investment Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education, Andrew Gee
- Secretary of the Department, Michele Bruniges

### **Key COVID-19 related roles**

- coordination with key stakeholders, including states and territories and education providers where appropriate, including through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG)
- support for early childhood education and care providers, including legislative changes and funding (for example, initially [Community Child Care Fund—Special Circumstances](#) grants and then the [Early Childhood and Care Relief Package](#); extension of funding for preschools until the end of 2021 through the [National Partnership on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education](#))
- schools policy and funding, for example, conditionally bringing forward payments of recurrent funding to non-government schools

- delivering the [Higher Education Relief Package](#) for higher education providers
- administers funding programs for students undertaking higher education courses and higher education research—temporary measures relating to COVID-19 are in place for [research students](#) and [medical students](#)
- coordinating the international education response through the [Global Reputation Taskforce](#) (note: visa matters sit with Home Affairs, and trade matters with Foreign Affairs and Trade)
- delivering the [Supporting Apprentices and Trainees](#) measure, announced as part of the Australian Government’s [Economic Response to the Coronavirus](#)
- monitoring the impact of COVID-19 on Australian businesses
- enforcing mutual obligation requirements of job seekers (exemptions have been extended to 22 May 2020) and
- delivered an online [Jobs Hub](#) to provide information on employment opportunities in areas of the economy with increased demand for workers.

### ***Portfolio agencies***

#### **Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority**

ACARA is an independent statutory authority. It is governed by a Board comprising nominees of education ministers and national peak non-government school bodies. Appointments to the Board are approved by the Minister for Education. ACARA’s work is directed by the COAG Education Council and its CEO is David de Carvalho. ACARA provides [resources for parents and carers](#) to support home-based learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership**

AITSL is a Commonwealth company. The Australian Government, as represented by the Minister for Education, is the sole company member. It is governed by an independent Board of Directors appointed by the Minister for Education, and its CEO is Mark Grant. AITSL provides [resources for teachers](#) to support the delivery of online/distance teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency**

TEQSA is the independent national quality assurance and regulatory agency for higher education. It is governed by Commissioners appointed by the Minister for Education. Its Chief Commissioner and acting CEO is [Professor Nick Saunders](#).

TEQSA has regulatory oversight of the higher education sector, including regular [regulatory advice and updates](#) on adjustments necessary to accommodate a move to online course delivery. It oversees regulatory fee relief and changes in cost recovery arrangements for providers, announced as part of the [Higher Education Relief Package](#).

#### **Australian Skills Quality Authority**

ASQA is the independent national regulator for vocational education and training. It is governed by Commissioners, appointed by the Governor-General, and reports to the Minister for Employment Skills. Its Chief Commissioner and CEO is [Saxon Rice](#). ASQA’s work is overseen by the COAG Skills Council.

AQSA has regulatory oversight of the vocational education and training sector, including regular [regulatory advice and updates](#) on adjustments necessary to accommodate a move to online

course delivery. It oversees regulatory fee relief and changes in cost recovery arrangements for providers, announced as part of the [Higher Education Relief Package](#).

### **The Australian Research Council**

The ARC is responsible for reporting to the Minister for Education on research matters, and administering the National Competitive Grants Program (NCGP) and Excellence in Research for Australia. Its CEO is [Professor Sue Thomas](#). The ARC manages the NCGP, including [application deadline extensions](#).

## **Finance**

### **Leadership**

- Minister for Finance, Matthias Cormann
- Assistant Minister for Finance, Zed Seselja
- Secretary of the Department, Rosemary Huxtable

### **Key COVID-19 related roles**

The Department of Finance is a central agency of the Australian Government. It supports the Government's ongoing priorities through the Budget process and fosters leading practice through the public sector resource management, governance and accountability frameworks. The Department of Finance recently released [procurement policy guidance](#) for Commonwealth government agencies undertaking procurement in the current environment and supporting suppliers that are unable to provide contractually agreed services due to COVID-19.

## **Foreign Affairs and Trade**

### **Leadership**

- Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women, Marise Payne ([member of the National Security Committee of Cabinet, NSC](#))
- Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, Simon Birmingham
- Assistant Minister for International Development and the Pacific, Alex Hawke
- Minister Assisting the Minister for Trade and Investment, Andrew Gee
- Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism and Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries, Jonathon Duniam
- Secretary of the Department, Frances Adamson

### **COVID taskforces**

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has established the following [specific units and taskforces](#) to implement its COVID-19 responses:

- **COVID-19 Coordination Unit**—principal point for the coordination of DFAT's COVID-19 response; whole-of-government policy coordination on implementing COVID-19 policy responses; facilitating the delivery of PPE and other medical imports to Australia.
- **COVID-19 Sectoral Support Taskforce**—works with the Department of Infrastructure and other agencies to deliver \$1 billion of the Government's COVID-19 economic measures; coordination

point for portfolio agencies on funding; supporting design and delivery of targeted assistance, principally to the tourism sector and Australian exporters.

- **People Division COVID-19 Unit**—coordinates advice and support on staff welfare, staff and dependants returning temporarily from posts to Australia; engages with the Australian Public Service Commission on workforce matters.
- **Enterprise Business Continuity**—leads strategic planning for DFAT’s enterprise level risk management and business continuity response to COVID-19; provides operational planning and advice on risk management to support business continuity for divisions, state/territory offices and the overseas network.
- **COVID-19 Communications Taskforce**—leads and coordinates internal communication and external communication with the public about DFAT’s response to COVID-19.
- **Office of the Pacific COVID-19 Response Coordination Unit**—oversees an essential services and humanitarian corridor into the Pacific and Timor-Leste; delivers a rapid financial package from the adapted aid program.
- **COVID-19 Development Response and Recovery Team**—oversees development of a COVID-19 response and recovery strategy in line with new development policy; manages overall development policy and communications in response to COVID-19.

### **Key COVID-19 related roles**

DFAT is responsible for external affairs. Those areas of relevance to the Department’s COVID-19 response include:

- provision of secure travel identification to Australian citizens
- provision of consular services to Australian citizens abroad
- management of diplomatic and consular missions
- international development cooperation and aid
- relations and communications with overseas governments and international organisations, including United Nations agencies and
- support for export and import-related businesses.
- supporting the whole-of-government COVID-19 response through foreign, trade, investment, tourism and development policy
- [working with the Department of Health](#) and other government departments to provide information for Australians considering overseas travel and for Australians overseas when considering whether to return home
- providing [consular assistance](#), including assisting [Australian citizens and permanent residents overseas return to Australia](#). This has included:
  - facilitating commercial flights from Peru, Argentina and South Africa, and working with relevant governments to support Australians overcome border closures and internal restrictions to ‘travel internally to major airports and gain the necessary flight approvals and airport clearances in locations where Australian airlines do not typically fly’. Australians caught on cruise ships have also been helped to repatriate. In the weeks leading up to 9 April, 280,000 Australians had returned from overseas

- providing exemptions where appropriate—for example, Pacific Islanders returning home are exempt from Australia’s travel ban on non-citizens and non-residents, and additional health screening for passengers flying to the Pacific has been put in place.
- providing support for diplomatic staff, including [recall of vulnerable or non-essential staff](#) from diplomatic missions and posts
- working with the Department of Health to [communicate with the WHO](#)
- helping to [secure freight access for Australian exports](#) and providing [finance for export businesses](#) affected by COVID-19 and
- coordinating Australia’s support for [the pandemic response in the region](#), including assistance with testing and laboratory diagnosis, the provision of PPE for health care workers and medical supplies and equipment, risk communication strategies and national response planning and budgeting. Australia, along with New Zealand, is funding the WHO Pacific regional coronavirus response plan (providing access to medical and technical advice on infection prevention and control, and clinical management). It is also supporting a range of health and medical research on infectious disease prevention, detection and control in the region.

### **Aid activities supporting the region’s COVID-19 response**

- **Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Economic Development (PROSPERA) (\$145 million over five years)**—providing technical advice to the Government of Indonesia on the pandemic response, including economic assessments, fiscal stimulus packages and non-cash vouchers for the unemployed.
- **Timor-Leste Partnership for Human Development (\$120 million over five years)**—health activities have been redirected to support COVID-19 preparedness and response, including social protection measures for stability and economic stimulus, and funding for essential services for women and girls.
- **Indo-Pacific Centre for Health Security (\$300 million 2017–21)**—supporting Australia’s COVID-19 development response, including work on prevention, detection and treatment, managing \$12 million in emergency funding and supporting rapid and effective national and international outbreak responses. [Examples of programs](#) managed by the Centre include:
  - the Pacific Infectious Disease Prevention program (\$25 million, 2019–22) and
  - the ASEAN-Pacific Infectious Disease Prevention Program (\$28 million, 2019–22).

### **Portfolio agencies**

#### **Australian Trade and Investment Commission ([Austrade](#))**

Austrade’s website [notes that it is working closely with other government departments](#) and industry agencies to help Australian businesses address COVID-19 related challenges. Austrade provides links to the Australian Government’s business support programs and posts regular updates on markets and associated logistics. It also provides [weekly regional updates](#) on the progression and impact of COVID-19 to support the international education sector and other sectors as required.

An [International Freight Assistance Mechanism](#) (IFAM) has also been established to accelerate delivery of agricultural and fisheries exports and re-establish global supply chains during the COVID-19 pandemic. An IFAM Co-ordinator-General has been appointed and a [network of 15 air](#)

[freight service providers](#) established to deliver regular freight services in the absence of commercial passenger flights.

Austrade is also working with the Zoo and Aquarium Association and state and territory tourism organisations to [implement grants to zoos and aquariums](#) towards animal welfare operating costs during the COVID-19 crisis.

## **Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research**

ACIAR is providing [new funding to support research](#) led by ACIAR Alumni across the Indo-Pacific:

*The Alumni Research Support Facility* is a one-off activity that will provide up to AUD \$20,000 for small research activities that build resilience and respond to the emerging challenges that COVID-19 has placed on agricultural systems in our partner countries.

...

We expect around 30 projects will receive funding in the first round, with research proposals that are able to be implemented in a 12-month period. Cross-disciplinary proposals are highly encouraged.

The Research Support Facility is designed to be reflexive to the global pandemic response and seeks to support initiatives that build resilience and respond to the emerging challenges that COVID-19 has placed on agricultural systems in our partner countries.

## **Health**

### ***Leadership***

- Minister for Health, Greg Hunt
- Minister for Youth, Sport, Aged Care and Senior Australians, Richard Colbeck
- Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government, Mark Coulton
- A/g Secretary of the Department, Caroline Edwards

### ***Key COVID-19 related roles***

While the Commonwealth has responsibilities in this area, state and territory governments carry primary responsibility across a wide range of health matters. The [Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) guides the Australian health sector response.

Key Commonwealth COVID-19 related roles include:

- funding of [Medicare Benefits Schedule](#) (MBS) services, including those provided by general practice and medical specialists, pathology, diagnostic imaging, allied health services such as physiotherapy, community nurses, and basic dental services for children. New [temporary MBS telehealth items](#) have been added to allow more health professionals to conduct consultations via telephone or videoconference, to reduce the risk of community transmission of COVID-19
- funding of the [Pharmaceutical Benefits Schedule](#) (PBS) and the Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and oversight and funding of community pharmacy arrangements. [Temporary changes to medicines regulation](#) have been made to ensure continued access to PBS medicines
- supporting and regulating private health insurance, including subsidising premiums through the [private health insurance rebate](#)

- [new agreements with private hospitals](#) to ensure their viability during COVID-19, in return for [use of their services](#) (state and territory governments can also make their own agreements with private hospitals)
- supporting and monitoring the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of primary health care services through [Primary Health Networks \(PHN\)](#). PHNs have received funding to identify and support private practices to act as [respiratory clinics](#)
- subsidising aged care services, such as residential care and home care, and regulating the aged care sector (see separate section on aged care for more information)
- funding for health and medical research through the [Medical Research Future Fund](#) and the National Health and Medical Research Council. Additional funding has been announced for [research into COVID-19 vaccines and treatments](#)
- funding veterans' health care through the Department of Veterans' Affairs
- funding community controlled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary health care organisations. A COVID-19 health [Management Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations](#) has been released
- maintaining the number of medical doctors in Australia (through Commonwealth-funded university places) and ensuring they are distributed equitably across the country
- buying vaccines for the national immunisation program and ensuring supplies of medicines and personal protective equipment for the [National Medical Stockpile](#)
- regulating medicines and medical devices through the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA)
- ensuring a secure supply of safe and affordable blood products
- coordinating national responses to health emergencies, including pandemics (shared with the states and territories—see below), including the operation of the [National Incident Room](#)
- funding a [COVID-19 national communication campaign](#) to promote health advice and services and
- providing grants to community organisations.

On 26 April 2020 the [Minister for Health launched](#) the Australian Government's [COVIDSafe app](#) for mobile phones to facilitate contact tracing by state/territory health authorities of people exposed to COVID-19.

In conjunction with the states and territories through national agreements and partnerships the Commonwealth shares responsibility for:

- funding free public hospital services. The total cost of the public health system response to COVID-19 will be shared between the Commonwealth and the states and territories under [a national partnership agreement](#)
- registering and accrediting health professionals through the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency
- funding [palliative care](#)
- [national mental health reform](#). The Commonwealth is providing [extra funding for mental health services](#) and [funding to support](#) the [National Mental Health and Wellbeing Pandemic Response Plan](#) and



- responding to national health emergencies via the [Australian Health Protection Principal Committee](#). The AHPPC comprises the Chief Health Officers from each state and territory, the [Chief Medical Officer](#), and representatives from key departments. It meets daily to assess the risk to Australia and recommend public health actions.

### **Key COVID-related legislation**

The key legislation in relation to the Commonwealth's health system response to COVID-19 is the [Biosecurity Act 2015](#) and the [National Health Security Act 2007](#). In addition, the Department administers a wide range of other legislation that may be relevant to COVID-19 activities.

### **Related portfolio responsibilities**

#### **Aged care**

The Australian Government is the primary funder and regulator of the aged care sector. The Department of Health is responsible for the aged care portfolio.

#### *Key COVID-19 related roles*

- upskilling and supporting aged care providers to practice robust infection control—for example, stand-by infection control teams to be deployed if an aged care facility requires assistance with managing an COVID-19 outbreak
- easing contractual restrictions on funding for services delivered in the community—for example, having the flexibility to cease group activities
- increased funding for aged care providers—for example, additional funding to services that provide meals to people in the community
- temporary delay in introducing new reforms and programs—for example, the introduction of payment administration changes for home care packages has been delayed
- cross-portfolio arrangement to ease international student visa working arrangements within aged care, so they can work additional hours
- coordinating with state and territory governments in the event of an outbreak
- developing and making available communication material and resources for older people—for example, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) advice for older people](#)
- funding grants—for example, the [Commonwealth Home Support Programme \(CHSP\)—emergency support for COVID-19](#) and
- introducing telephone options to support older people—for example, establishing a dedicated telephone line.

The role of the [Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission in responding to COVID-19](#) includes the provision of education and practical tools, and managing complaints.

#### **Sport**

The Department of Health is responsible for administering [the sports portfolio](#). The key agency administering sports funding and sporting activity is the Australian Sports Commission (which includes Sport Australia and the Australian Institute of Sport).

- On 18 March 2020 the minister announced [guidelines for community sport](#). These were [superseded on 29 March](#) by a general limit placed on public gatherings to two persons, but at the time of writing [they remain on the SportAUS website](#).

- On 24 April the Prime Minister announced that the National Cabinet had agreed that the AHPPC will develop, for consideration, [key principles for the recommencement of community and professional sport, and recreational activities](#).

## **Portfolio agencies**

### **Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency**

Audit schedules and processes for ARPANSA's [Australian Clinical Dosimetry Service](#) have been adjusted with increased focus on remote auditing and prioritising urgent hospital requests for audits of radiotherapy machines.

### **Food Standards Australia New Zealand**

FSANZ has been liaising with the Department of Health, the Department of Agriculture, state and territory health authorities, and international counterparts to provide the most up-to-date [advice for food businesses](#), charities, groups and volunteers donating food, and for consumers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Therapeutic Goods Administration**

The TGA has developed and published [new minimum technical requirements for domestically manufactured ventilators](#) to ensure ventilators are suitable for supply and use in Australian hospitals when approved devices are not available during the COVID-19 emergency.

It also introduced the [Therapeutic Goods \(Excluded Goods—Hand Sanitisers\) Determination 2020](#) and [guidance to enable the production of hand sanitiser](#) (that meets certain standards) to proceed without requirements for TGA approval or notification, to ease supply pressures caused by the COVID-19 outbreak.

## **Home Affairs**

### **Leadership**

- Minister for Home Affairs, Peter Dutton
- Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management, David Littleproud
- Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs, David Coleman (Alan Tudge is currently the acting minister)
- Assistant Minister for Customs, Community Safety and Multicultural Affairs, Jason Wood
- Secretary of the Department, Mike Pezzullo

### **Key COVID-19 related roles**

Emergency Management Australia leads the [National Coordination Mechanism](#) that was [announced on 5 March 2020](#). The NCM is working with relevant federal departments and agencies and state and territory governments to 'co-ordinate the whole of government responses to issues outside the direct health management of COVID-19', including engagement with relevant sectors such as 'education, public safety and policing, banking, transport, food, and agriculture'. The NCM is supported by a [taskforce/Coordination Node led by Deputy Secretary Paul Grigson](#) and [reports to the National COVID-19 Coordination Commission](#) established in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C).

The Secretary, Mike Pezzullo, sits on the [National COVID-19 Commission Executive Board](#) with the Secretary of PM&C and private sector and not-for-profit representatives.

The Department is administering [adjustments to visa and citizenship arrangements](#), including:

- providing [information and advice on remaining lawfully in Australia](#) to temporary visa holders who are unable to return to their home countries and whose visas are expiring
- relaxing working conditions on visas for some international students and working holiday-makers
- maintaining visa validity for certain temporary skilled visa holders who have been stood down and
- enabling some temporary visa holders access to the [Temporary Activity \(subclass 408\) Australian Government Endorsed Event stream visa](#) to extend their stay in Australia.

The Australian Border Force (ABF) is/has been involved in:

- working with airlines to [identify individuals at overseas airports](#) who should not board a flight to Australia (through its existing airport/airline liaison officer program)
- enforcing enhanced border control and screening measures, including those announced on [1 February 2020, 19 March and 24 March, and administering exemptions to the travel ban](#)
- enforcing the [ban on international cruise vessels docking](#) in Australia
- [supporting state and territory governments](#) to enforce [mandatory quarantine for overseas arrivals](#) and
- implementing a [determination made under the Biosecurity Act 2015](#) to have essential goods attempted for export and in ABF custody [surrendered to the National Medical Stockpile](#).

The Department's [COVID-19 and the border website outlines updates to Australia's immigration and border arrangements](#) during the COVID-19 outbreak. It includes pages on: [leaving Australia](#); [staying in Australia](#); [coming to Australia](#); [transiting Australia](#); [imports and exports](#); [citizenship](#); [industry and employers](#); and [immigration detention](#).

## **Portfolio agencies**

### **Australian Federal Police**

The AFP is working with other federal agencies through the [Covid-19 Counter Fraud Taskforce](#), which is 'focused on identifying, taking action on and preventing fraud against the COVID-19 economic stimulus measures and any other welfare support program', and [established Taskforce IRIS](#) 'to target people and organised crime entities who seek to defraud the government'.

In April 2020 it also began [deploying up to 102 police and protective service officers to the Northern Territory](#) 'to help protect vulnerable and remote communities during the COVID-19 Pandemic'.

### **Australian Institute of Criminology**

The AIC undertakes and disseminates policy-relevant research on crime and justice to inform crime and justice policy and practice in Australia. In response to COVID-19, the AIC has been issuing [regular compilations of research and other resources](#) from around the world related to COVID-19 and crime and justice, and published its own COVID-19 related research, such as [Availability of COVID-19 Related Products on Tor Darknet Markets](#) and [Changes in Online Gambling during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

## Industry, Science, Energy and Resources

### **Leadership**

- Minister for Industry, Science and Technology, Karen Andrews
- Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction, Angus Taylor
- Minister for Resources, Water and Northern Australia, Keith Pitt
- Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, Michaelia Cash
- Assistant Minister for Northern Australia, Michelle Landry
- Secretary of the Department, David Fredericks

### **COVID-19 taskforces**

- Personal Protective Equipment Taskforce (Testing Kits, PPE Supplies, Medical Supplies and Ventilators and Other Consumables)
- Freight and Transport
- Non-Medical PPE
- Triaging and Co-ord
- Resilience and Recovery (Advanced Manufacturing and Keystone Industries)
- COVID Energy Recovery
- COVID Energy Preparedness and Response
- Corporate Co-ord Response

### **Key COVID-19 related roles**

- developed a dedicated [COVID-19 information hub](#) to collate information, media releases and news about the Department's response to the COVID-19 pandemic
- [sourcing personal protective equipment, medical supplies and ventilators](#) for the National Medical Stockpile, through [tenders](#) and [expressions of interest](#) for key products
- working with Australian industry to [pivot production outputs, increase local manufacturing capabilities and secure supply](#) of critical products
- [coordinating enquiries and offers of assistance](#) from businesses to deliver primary products or services during the COVID-19 crisis
- monitoring stocks and demand, mapping domestic production capability and reporting to [build manufacturing business capability](#) to produce critical products and make informed and quick decisions in response to COVID-19
- established the [Energy Coordination Mechanism](#) to enable cooperation between Commonwealth, state and territory governments and industry to ensure the energy sector continues to support the economy and community during the COVID-19 pandemic
- [extended operating hours of the business.gov.au Contact Centre](#) to meet increased demand for support for businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and

- Australia's Chief Scientist is leading a team of experts on the [Rapid Research Information Forum \(RRIF\) to provide answers to ministers and key decision-makers](#) in regard to COVID-19 related questions.

## ***Portfolio agencies***

### **Australian Energy Market Operator**

- working with key stakeholders in the energy industry, including electricity generators, gas facilities, network businesses and other market participants, to [support pandemic management actions across the sector and maintain reliable and secure energy supply](#) and
- created a [forecasting model to quantify the impact of COVID-19](#) on electricity demand.

### **Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation**

- modifying and [re-arranging work programs to fast track access to infrastructure](#) for COVID-19 related research, such as development of a vaccine.

### **Clean Energy Regulator**

- developed updated advice for [Emissions Reduction Fund participants requiring audits](#), and [Registered Greenhouse and Energy Auditors conducting audits](#) during COVID-19 restrictions.

### **Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)**

- [conducting key research](#) as part of the rapid global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including establishing a biological model, analysing the SARS-CoV-2 genomic sequence, and vaccine candidate testing and
- contributing to COVID-19-related advice provided to ministers and key decision-makers through the RRIF.

### **IP Australia**

- implementing a [streamlined process for extension of time requests](#) and waiving or refunding associated fees for customers affected by COVID-19.

### **National Measurement Institute**

- [providing advice on standards](#) to ensure PPE, instruments and tests used by laboratories and frontline clinical staff have appropriate quality controls
- establishing new testing capabilities to provide validation and accreditation to priority areas and
- supporting manufacturers to re-tool to produce urgently needed products.

### **National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority**

- providing instruction and [interim guidelines to operators of offshore oil and gas facilities](#) in regard to [infectious disease management plans](#), and measures to ensure health and safety of offshore workers during the COVID-19 pandemic
- conducting [online inspection meetings and collecting regulatory information](#) from offshore operators, in line with a [new compliance strategy](#) for effectively regulating the offshore industry during the COVID-19 pandemic and
- issued a [Safety Alert](#) for the introduction of modified roster arrangements to reduce the spread of COVID-19 among members of the offshore workforce.

## **National Offshore Petroleum Titles Administrator**

- prepared [guidance for new measures introduced to provide flexibility to offshore oil and gas explorers' work commitments](#) to help the sector manage and plan through the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure ongoing, future investment.

## **Questacon**

- building [online science learning programs and content](#) to support children engaging with science education while the physical centre is closed.

## **Snowy Hydro Limited**

- introduced a [range of protective measures, in response to COVID-19](#), including temporarily ceasing all disconnections, charging no interest on debt and providing additional resourcing to customer services to manage customers impacted by COVID-19.

## **Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications**

### ***Leadership***

- Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development, Michael McCormack
- Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts, Paul Fletcher
- Minister for Population, Cities and Urban Infrastructure, Alan Tudge
- Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government, Mark Coulton
- Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education, Andrew Gee
- Assistant Minister for Road Safety and Freight Transport, Scott Buchholz
- Assistant Minister to the Deputy Prime Minister, Kevin Hogan
- Assistant Minister for Regional Development and Territories, Nola Marino
- Secretary of the Department, Simon Atkinson

### ***Key COVID-19 related roles***

The Department's overall [COVID-19 response structure](#):

- [supporting workers and organisations](#) in the cultural and creative sector
- [suspending Australian programming obligations](#) for the remainder of 2020
- assisting the [aviation sector](#)
- supporting the [heavy vehicle industry](#)
- made [getting home from overseas](#) easier
- supporting regions, communities and industry sectors that have been severely affected by the COVID-19 crisis through the [Relief and Recovery Fund](#) and
- [helping sustain Australian media businesses](#) as they keep the community informed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## ***Portfolio agencies***

### **Australian Communications and Media Authority**

- the Government brought forward the release of \$5 million from its Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund administered by ACMA. ACMA will [conditionally relax enforcement on telcos](#) who do not comply with certain segments of the Telecommunications Consumer Protections (TCP) Code during the COVID-19 health crisis.

### **National Capital Authority**

- reviewing its operations on an ongoing basis in line with advice from health officials and government (see [current review outcomes](#)).

### **Australia Council**

- the Australia Council's \$5 million [Resilience Fund](#) will provide assistance to the Australian arts sector through three funding streams—Survive, Adapt and Create.

### **Australian Broadcasting Corporation**

- outlined how it is keeping the nation [informed, educated and entertained](#) in response to COVID-19, with trusted content and services for all Australians.

### **Australian Postal Corporation**

- launched a [Pharmacy Home Delivery Service](#), following the Government's announcement of \$25 million to fund home medicine services in the wake of COVID-19 and
- partnered with Woolworths to deliver [Woolworths Basic Boxes](#).

### **Civil Aviation Safety Authority**

- [providing support](#) for air operators, flight training organisations, maintenance organisations, aerodrome operators, pilots, engineers, air traffic controllers, sports aviation and the remotely piloted aircraft sector.

### **Special Broadcasting Service Corporation**

- launched a [multilingual online portal](#) to provide information on the COVID-19 outbreak for Australia's diverse communities.

### **Australian Rail Track Corporation Limited**

- taking [steps in response to COVID-19](#) to ensure that for Australians who rely on a rail network, their freight reaches its destination, and that essential workers can get to their job.

### **NBN Co Limited**

- [connecting families with remote schooling needs](#) and keeping Australian households, small and medium businesses, and essential and emergency services connected
- establishing a [\\$150 million financial relief and assistance fund](#) to help internet providers support customers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and
- extending its offers to provide [up to 40 per cent additional capacity](#) to internet providers at no extra cost, and [increase download data limits for its standard Sky Muster™ service](#) for another two months.

## Prime Minister and Cabinet

### Leadership

- Prime Minister, Scott Morrison
- Minister for Women, Marise Payne
- Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Cabinet, Greg Hunt (responsibility for public service matters was [temporarily reassigned on 6 April 2020 to Ben Morton](#) due to the COVID-19 pandemic)
- Minister for Indigenous Australians, Ken Wyatt
- Assistant Minister to the Prime Minister, Ben Morton
- Secretary of the Department, Philip Gaetjens

The Department provides advice to the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, Portfolio Ministers, and Assistant Ministers with a particular focus on coordinating and developing policy across the Government in economic, domestic and international issues, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, and public service stewardship.

### Key COVID-19 related roles

#### Paused implementation planning of APS Reform Agenda

In an [open letter to public servants](#) on 9 April 2020 the Australian Public Service (APS) Commissioner and the Secretary of PM&C advised:

The change that is taking place right now and the lessons of this crisis will be fundamental to the future of the APS. We are reforming in practice as we act to respond to COVID-19.

For this reason, together with the Secretaries Board we have agreed to pause implementation planning of the APS reform agenda.

#### Pay freeze

In a media release on 9 April the Assistant Minister to the Prime Minister and Cabinet announced the [deferral of general wage increases for Commonwealth Public Servants for six months](#).

The deferral of wage increases commences from 14 April and will remain in effect for 12 months. During this period, agencies will defer upcoming wage increases by 6 months as they fall due. This will ensure the deferral is shared equally by all APS employees.

Assistant Minister Morton has signed a Determination under subsection 24(3) of the *Public Service Act 1999* giving effect to this decision, taken due to the exceptional economic circumstances being faced by Australians as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. **This Determination will apply to APS agencies only.**

The Assistant Minister has asked the APS Commissioner, Mr Peter Woolcott AO, to exercise his authority under the Government's bargaining policy to **ensure that new wage proposals approved over the next 12 months are also consistent with the Government's expectations of a 6 month deferral of pay increases**. The Assistant Minister has also asked the Commissioner to write to non-APS agencies, **informing them of the Government's expectations of them to implement a 6 month deferral as well**.  
*[emphasis added]*



The minister's media release also noted:

Last month [March 2020], the Government implemented a stay for **senior Public Servants' salary** increases and also requested a stay for all **Ministers, parliamentarians and parliamentary office holders**. *[emphasis added]*

### **Additional staff and redeployments**

In a [press conference on 23 April](#) Prime Minister Morrison stated:

PRIME MINISTER: Some 3,000 extra staff have been surged into the Australian Taxation Office ... Some 5,000 additional staff have been surged into Services Australia and, on top of that, another 3,000 have been redeployed both within Services Australia and across the Australian Public Service ...

JOURNALIST: ... A point of clarification - you gave several figures about new public servants and transfers. What is the net figure of new people brought on staff?

PRIME MINISTER: 5,000.

JOURNALIST: Is it 8,000 or 5,000?

PRIME MINISTER: 5,000 is how many additional people have been brought into the task and that includes with service providers. As you know, early on, one of the first things they did with the service providers was to lift some of the call centre staff out of, I think it was out of one of the airlines actually, and have them move in and they started processing JobSeeker claims, which has worked very well.

However, it is not completely clear which 'surged' staff are new 'on staff' employees, which are employed by 'service providers', and which are redeployed employees.

### **Portfolio agencies**

#### **Australian National Audit Office**

The ANAO is [monitoring the Government's COVID-19 response](#) via several initiatives:

- conducting regular [assurance reviews of the Advances to the Finance Minister](#) (AFM), due to the AFM being much larger than normal
- developing and publishing an audit program of the Government's COVID-19 response measures. The ANAO's [Draft 2020–21 Annual Audit Work Program](#) includes a multi-year strategy to review COVID-19 response measures and
- reporting on key messages from audits of past activities that involved [the rapid implementation of government initiatives](#), which are likely to be applicable to the national COVID-19 response.

#### **Australian Public Service Commission**

The APSC has published [COVID-specific guidance](#) for public servants on leave arrangements and remote working, including:

- [Circular 2020/1: COVID-19 leave arrangements](#)
- [Circular 2020/3: COVID-19—Remote working and evolving work arrangements](#) (superseded by Circular 2020/6)
- [Circular 2020/6: Temporary mobility arrangements as part of the continued response to COVID-19](#)

## National Indigenous Australians Agency

The NIAA is overseeing Indigenous-specific program support; food security; support for businesses and service providers servicing Indigenous Australians; Indigenous community safety; and Indigenous employment support ([see NIAA COVID-19 webpage](#)):

- **Travel restrictions**—enacted under the [Biosecurity Act 2015](#) by the Health Minister and jointly announced with the Minister for Indigenous Australians. There are restrictions on non-essential travel including service provision and 14-day isolation requirements for anyone entering a designated area.
- **Northern Territory Land Councils**—\$10 million from the Aboriginals Benefit Account has been provided to the four Northern Territory Land Councils for immediate needs and expenses associated with people returning to homelands, people who may be required to self-isolate, and to deal with the remote travel restrictions.
- **Community Night Patrol**—an additional \$10 million over two financial years has been made available to assist in ensuring community safety, including support to providers to expand or alter current services in relation to travel restrictions and social distancing requirements.
- **Program delivery**—\$23 million from the Indigenous Advancement Strategy has been provided to enhance Indigenous social programs whose delivery is affected by COVID-19.
- **Food Security**—a Food Security Working Group has been established to help ensure supply to regional and remote Indigenous communities.
- **School Nutrition Projects**—an additional \$5 million from the Indigenous Advancement Strategy has been provided to expand the delivery of school nutrition projects to continue through pupil-free days and school holidays, to accommodate the higher costs in relation to COVID-19, and to expand the program to other vulnerable members of remote Indigenous communities.
- **Community Development Program**—face-to-face activities under the program have been suspended; monthly set payments have been provided in lieu of participation activities, suspensions, and penalties; the rate of payment has been increased in line with Jobseeker.
- **Indigenous Business Australia**—\$50 million has been made available via IBA to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses, including as loans and support services—for example, in relation to administering JobKeeper.
- **Local Indigenous Jobs Initiative**—an additional \$25 million through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy has been allocated to an employment initiative targeted at regions and industries facing labour shortfalls as a result of COVID-19.

## Social Services

### **Leadership**

- Minister for Families and Social Services, Anne Ruston
- Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme, Minister for Government Services, Stuart Robert
- Assistant Minister for Children and Families, Assistant Minister for Northern Australia, Michelle Landry
- Assistant Minister for Community Housing, Homelessness and Community Services, Luke Howarth
- Secretary of the Department, Kathryn Campbell

### **Key COVID-19 related roles**

- social security and family assistance payments (including JobSeeker Payment, the Coronavirus Supplement, and lump-sum Economic Support Payments)
- grants to community service organisations, including for emergency relief and financial counselling services
- mental health services
- housing and homelessness programs and
- assistance for people with disability and their carers (separate to the National Disability Insurance Scheme, NDIS).

### **Portfolio agencies**

#### **Services Australia**

Key [COVID-19 related roles](#) include:

- administering/delivering social security, family assistance and veterans payments
- administering Medicare claims/rebates and
- implementing [new payment claim procedures](#), extended phone line hours and increased myGov capacity.

[The Prime Minister announced](#) an additional 5,000 staff to support service delivery, further to the redeployments from other agencies (details of the agencies providing staff were provided in an [Answer to a Question on Notice](#)).

#### **National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA)**

The Agency is responsible for implementing the NDIS. Key [COVID-19 related roles](#) include:

- seeking to support the viability of disability providers and the safety of the workforce through activities such as modifying payment administration, providing additional funding and moving away from face-to-face meetings
- seeking to support NDIS participants through activities such as extending participant plans
- working with supermarkets to provide participants with home delivery services and

- facilitating more flexible use of participant plan funding.

### **NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission**

The [NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission](#) is responsible for the regulatory functions of the NDIS supports and services. Key COVID-19 related roles include:

- requiring registered disability providers to notify the Commission if they are unable to provide support and services
- providing training for NDIS workers (for example, infection control) and
- managing complaints.

## **Treasury**

### ***Leadership***

- Treasurer, Josh Frydenberg
- Assistant Minister to the Treasurer, Michael Sukkar
- Secretary to the Treasury, Steven Kennedy

### ***Key COVID-19 related roles***

Treasury is providing advice, and developing and implementing policy responses central to the Government's economic response to COVID-19, including through:

- economic monitoring, analysis and advice to government about the economic implications of COVID-19, restrictions and economic response measures
- developing the economic policy responses to COVID-19, including providing advice on specific policies, and on the overall size and composition of the economic support package
- developing legislation to implement the response measures for which Treasury has responsibility, and monitoring implementation of all response measures
- supporting international engagement with other nations and international organisations to enable global cooperation through this crisis
- supporting state and territory engagement, including through regular meetings of Treasurers and National Cabinet and
- providing information on the Government's economic response measures, through the whole-of-government information campaign, Treasury website, and fact sheets.

### ***Portfolio agencies***

#### **Australian Bureau of Statistics**

The ABS is Australia's national statistical agency, providing official statistics on a wide range of economic, social, population and environmental matters of importance to Australia. The *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975* and the *Census and Statistics Act 1905* set out the primary functions, duties and powers of the ABS. The Australian Statistician is David Gruen.

The ABS has undertaken a [range of new work in the wake of COVID-19](#), providing relevant insights on households, employment and industry to inform government, business and community responses to the pandemic. New statistical releases will provide information on:

- business impacts such as cash flow and turnover
- additional monthly analysis on hours worked, including reasons for working less hours, and quarterly hours worked analysis by industry
- preliminary retail turnover data
- interactive employment maps
- preliminary import and export data
- COVID-related employment and health implications for households
- additional analysis of short-term overseas visitors and international students and
- interactive age and health conditions population maps.

‘Confidentialised’ microdata for Australian businesses will be made available for researchers through TableBuilder so they can produce tables, graphs and maps. The ABS website contains the release dates of [COVID-19 related publications](#).

Some data collections, such as Overseas Arrivals and Departures and Retail Trade have suspended their time series estimates until further notice. The trend estimates will be reintroduced when patterns in the underlying behaviour of passenger travel movements/retail purchasing stabilises.

Households and businesses are encouraged to complete their [surveys online or by phone where possible](#). The ABS will continue to assess and refine their approach over coming months as events unfold.

### **Australian Energy Regulator**

The Regulator has developed and released a [Statement of Expectations for energy companies](#) to protect householders and small business customers during the COVID-19 pandemic, and ensure the continued safe and reliable supply of energy to homes and businesses.

### **Australian Taxation Office**

The ATO is responsible for managing the tax system and administration response to COVID-19, as well as specific stimulus responses. Examples of responses being undertaken through the ATO include:

- [administrative responses](#), such as deferring lodgement and payment obligations
- engaging in the administration of the [JobKeeper payment scheme](#) and [early release of superannuation](#) (Services Australia has published a [guide to JobKeeper](#) which reiterates it is being administered by the ATO)
- providing administrative guidance on available tax deductions (including guidance on administratively simplified deductions) for [working from home](#)
- providing additional [support to businesses](#), including administering government announcements relating to instant asset write-off, accelerated depreciation and additional tax credits

- providing a [broad range of administrative arrangements](#) relating to GST, penalties and interest, and PAYG arrangements
- providing [specialist support for tax agents](#) and
- publishing a [COVID-19 FAQ document](#) that relates to a broad range of administrative and tax technical issues.

### **Australian Prudential Regulation Authority**

APRA is an independent statutory authority responsible for supervising and ensuring the prudential stability of institutions across the banking, insurance and superannuation sectors. In response to COVID-19 it has taken a number of specific measures to help protect the flow of credit to the economy while ensuring the soundness of these sectors. This includes:

- [refocusing its prudential and supervisory approach](#) to address matters related to COVID-19
- issuing prudential guidance to banks in order to outline its expectations in response to COVID-19. In a [March media release](#) APRA stated that ‘given the prevailing circumstances, it envisages they [banks] may need to utilise some of their current large [capital] buffers to facilitate ongoing lending to the economy’
- [deferring implementation](#) of the Basel III international capital standards for one year and
- releasing [guidance to banks and insurers on capital management](#). It stated that it expects that banks limit discretionary capital distributions (e.g. dividends) in the coming months.

### **Reserve Bank of Australia**

The Reserve Bank is responsible for the conduct of monetary policy and for monitoring the stability of the financial sector. The RBA has been exercising these responsibilities through:

- lowering the target cash rate to 0.25 per cent
- providing a \$90 billion Term Funding Facility to lower the cost of finance in the banking system
- providing liquidity to the banking sector by significantly expanding its daily open market operations
- providing liquidity to the Australian Government bond market by buying Australian Government securities in secondary markets and
- entering into foreign exchange swap lines with foreign central banks to ensure the accessibility of the Australian financial sector to foreign exchange.

Refer to the RBA’s website for more information on the [RBA’s COVID-19 response](#).

### **Australian Securities and Investment Commission**

ASIC is Australia’s corporate, financial markets and services and consumer credit regulator. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic [ASIC has also refocused its regulatory efforts](#), including prioritising regulatory guidance specifically related to COVID-19.

### **Australian Competition and Consumer Commission**

The ACCC is responsible for the regulation of competition and national consumer law within Australia. Its [response to the COVID-19 crisis](#) has included:

- issuing [guidance to small business](#) about their rights and obligations in response to events caused by the COVID-19 pandemic

- issuing [guidance on consumer rights](#), in relation to issues such as travel and event cancellations in response to COVID-19
- monitoring and informing consumers about COVID-19 related scams
- continuing to monitor businesses' pricing practices and drawing attention to sectors and businesses where it considers there is excessive pricing and
- seeking to minimise regulatory burden as much as possible.

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