



**Date: 30/04/2020**

# April COVID-19 Update

Each weekday since the coronavirus pandemic crisis arrived, the union has provided an update on all industrial matters that affect members. We're here to provide you with the most current information about your rights at work, and especially at a time of constant change, we want to ensure members are not only aware of your rights, but also important matters that might help you to advocate for your colleagues, family and friends.

Here's a summary of all the changes and important news that we have compiled over the month of April 2020:

## Disability Members:

- In late April, Federal Health Minister Greg Hunt announced half a million face masks will be provided to disability sector in Australia.
- 'Hotels for Heroes' program expanded to include disability workers who need to self-isolate due to risks about them staying at home during the coronavirus pandemic.
- HACSU leaders are in discussion with the Minister for Disability regarding the plan for the roll out of half a million PPE announced this week for the disability sector.
- Assistant State Secretary, Kate Marshall has been continuing her industrial advocacy work throughout April in the Fair Work Commission to better support the disability workforce during this pandemic. We'll keep you updated with any relevant information that comes to light on these matters.
- Thanks to the advocacy of HACSU members, the Victorian Chief Health Officer, provided advice that that transporting clients for the purpose of de-escalating behaviours of concern is considered to be work for disability workers and is a form of support for residents.
- HACSU leaders have met with CEOs of the disability transfer providers (Melba, Home at Scope, Possability and Life Without Barriers) to discuss operations during this pandemic crisis.
- We asked for a non-touch thermometer be made available at each and every disability house, and that temperatures are taken for everyone entering the house (workers, clients and visitors) prior to entry. If someone has a fever, they should not be in the workplace and should return home and seek medical advice; get tested for the coronavirus.
- For those DHHS Disability members who were successful in their existing expression of interest; the following was determined:
  - Those who were successful in obtaining an ERP who wish to advance their exit date, this may be accepted on a case-by-case basis.



- Those who were successful in obtaining an ERP who wish to extend their exit to a later date, this option may be open to you; contact the Department for further details.
- Those who were successful in obtaining an ERP who wish to withdraw their offer of the ERP, this may be accepted on a case-by-case basis.

## Mental Health Members:

- In late April, the Department of Health and Human Services advised public health services they should pay bank, casual and part-time workers whose weekly hours and patterns of work have been disrupted due to COVID-19. This was made effective from April 1, so backpay will apply to these workers and with workers paid a wage based on average earnings over the past twelve months.
- The Department of Health and Human Services issued advice directly to all public health employers aimed at supporting casual and part-time employees whose weekly hours might have changed due to the current pandemic to ensure there was no disadvantage to these workers. The arrangement applies to all casual workers employed directly by the public health service on a regular and systematic basis for the previous 12 months, including clinical and non-clinical workers across any work functions (including those who work in hospitals, outside of mental health).
- A number of members have reached out to us recently to ask about the status of the Public Mental Health EBA, in light of the impacts of COVID-19. We have emailed members advising of the most current update relating to your EBA so please check your inbox for details. HACSU remains committed to bargaining for your EBA and we'll provide further updates when we have more information available.
- Hello Open Minds, a Government initiative to encourage employment in the mental health sector will soon be involving HACSU in a project to promote relocation packages to recruit clinical workers into rural areas, to provide cadetships and work to include pre-graduates in work programs at major service providers.
- Recent funding has been announced for a Lived Experience Workforce Committee which HACSU members will be encouraging members to join if you are part of the lived experience workforce. Watch this space for details.
- Elective surgeries will begin again from the last week of April, with hospitals taking a staggered approach to re-introducing surgeries.
- In April, the State Government announced details of a \$59.4 million funding package aimed at strengthening mental health services in the state during (and in response to) the coronavirus pandemic. Mental health members please check your inbox for further details on this funding update.
- AHPRA registration renewal will take place soon for many members. AHPRA have advised that they are "prepared to be flexible in their approach" to registration at the present time, given the restrictions that may be in place with planned leave, conference attendance and other training issues clinicians may face. For the most up to date information go to <https://www.ahpra.gov.au/News/COVID-19.aspx>



- \$1.3 billion has been allocated to expand the amount of hospital beds in Victoria by 450 beds to 4000 beds total in Victoria.
- The Royal Commission into Mental Health is continuing with adjustments to processes to allow for social distancing.
- Over 10,000 workers have expressed an interest to return to work in the health industry, and students are being brought into services to provide further support. If you or someone you know has left the industry, and would be interested in returning at critical time, you can register your interest here: <https://healthworkforceresponse.dhhs.vic.gov.au/>
- Today is the last day for AHPRA accredited members to receive 3 months FREE on your phone bill with Optus; go to the website to register or go to your local store to sign up before the end of today.

## Workplace Updates for All Members:

- We are receiving many questions from members around the JobKeeper entitlements; please speak to your employer about their position on JobKeeper before speaking to the union. We will then be able to give you tailored advice based on what your employer's position may be.
- Today we're alerting you to changes made last week to the Fair Work Act that may impact you. The changes reduce the minimum time allowed for employers to vary an Enterprise Agreement (EBA) to one day. This means that employers can ask workers to vote on changes with one day of notice. The types of changes that could happen include lowering your pay or reducing your paid sick leave days. Contact HACSU as soon as you hear of any proposed changes to your EBA or votes taking place.
- The *COVID-19 Omnibus (Emergency Measures) Bill 2020* was passed by Victorian Parliament this month, which included a raft of measures, such as the expansion of WorkCover payments for long term injured workers. You can read more about these changes in an article by Slater and Gordon in this month's [Hello HACSU](#).
- For those 'higher-risk' workers, employers should be flexible when granting leave to or agreeing to alternative or flexible working arrangements. These include any workers who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 50 years and older with a cooccurring medical condition, people 65 years and older with chronic medical conditions, people 70 years and older and people with compromised immune systems.
- Pregnant women should be considered by employers a potentially vulnerable group and it is being recommended that employers should assess the risks for pregnant health care workers and consider alternative duties and patient allocation from 28 weeks' gestation.
- The Victorian Government estimate that unemployment will peak in September 2020 with upwards of 270,000 Victorians or 11% of the working population out of work. With months ahead of likely increasing unemployment, it's never been a better time to be a union member. While most HACSU members work in essential services, it's still crucial to ensure your rights at work. Talk to your colleagues today about the importance of being a HACSU member.



- Currently to date, we know that the following councils and shires are providing free parking around hospital areas, for essential healthcare workers:
  - Ballarat City Council
  - Bass Shire Council
  - Glenelg City Council
  - Indigo Shire Council
  - Loddon Shire Council
  - Melbourne City Council
  - Mitchell Shire Council
  - Moreland City Council
  - Moyne Shire Council
  - Stonnington City Council
  - Strathbogie Shire Council
  - Swan Hill Shire Council
- In April, we secured free childcare for all essential workers for the short term, to allow essential workers to go to work

Quotes from Kate Marshall, HACSU Assistant State Secretary in relation to today's announcement of free childcare for all essential workers:

*"Today's announcement of free childcare for children of all essential workers is an extraordinary and highly necessary measure to ensure HACSU members can get to work, knowing their children are safe and well cared for.*

*This is also important for the thousands of low-paid workers who normally rely on grandparents, due to the high costs associated with childcare, who can't at the moment because of the risk this virus poses to older Australians.*

*Being a proud single mother of two young girls, I know now that I can continue to focus on providing HACSU members with the best possible outcomes, while my girls are safe, secure and happily at play at their regular centre.*

*To HACSU members, and other union members across the country; know that this and other important measures recently announced to improve workers' rights are outcomes of your strength and solidarity. We're here, and our collective voice is being heard."*



## Coronavirus Health and Testing:

- Stage 3 restrictions will continue until midnight May 11th 2020, meaning there are restrictions on visitors to HACSU members' worksites (not including workers). For more accurate up to date information on directions, please check the Department's website <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/state-emergency>
- In the last week of April, the Victorian Government announced they will be undertaking a coronavirus testing blitz, with 100,000 Victorians to be tested in the next two weeks, including mobile testing visiting some essential workplaces.
- If you are exhibiting one symptom including respiratory issues, runny nose, body aches, fever, headache or fatigue; get tested. Do not go to work.
- Healthcare workers who are confirmed cases are required to undergo two consecutive negative respiratory COVID-19 tests, collected 24 hours apart after the acute illness has resolved, before returning to work; this must be at least 7 days after the onset of illness.
- If you have a close contact who is a confirmed case, you should not return to work until you have completed a full 14 days of self-isolation; regardless of whether you have symptoms.
- As not enough is known about the impact of COVID-19 for pregnant healthcare workers, those pre-28-weeks gestation are to avoid areas where suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases are; where this is not possible pregnant employees should wear PPE in line with current DHHS advice.
- After 28 weeks gestation, pregnant employees should not be in roles with direct client contact and avoid all contact with.
- For workers who are unwell or for whose underlying medical conditions prevent them from working, it is expected Personal Leave is used first; access to Special Leave will be considered on a case-by-case basis, if alternative duties cannot be found.
- Have you been injured at work and want to share your story on video? Contact us via email [brendanc@hacsu.asn.au](mailto:brendanc@hacsu.asn.au)

## Health and Safety:

- As a reminder, it is an offence to deliberately transmit COVID-19 to another person OR to behave in a way that makes someone feel fearful that they may catch it from you. An example of the type of behaviour may be 'pretending' to transmit by coughing on another person or coughing on someone when you have tested positive. The penalty carried is very serious and may carry prison terms, upwards of life imprisonment, depending on the outcome of a transmission.
- If any HACSU member is threatened with being infected or if there are other health and safety issues relating to anyone in your workplace deliberately transmitting COVID-19, contact us as soon as possible to advise us on 1300 651 931.
- A reminder to members who may not already be aware, earlier this year the Government mandated vaccinations (including the annual flu vaccine) for all hospital and residential aged



care workers who are in roles with direct patient contact. You can read more about this legislation here .

## Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):

- We have continued to advocate for PPE for HACSU members throughout April as a priority with HACSU State Secretary Paul Healey and Assistant State Secretary meeting with both the Minister for Health and Minister for Disability frequently to express our concerns about the lack of PPE.
- We've had some great recognition from State and Federal leaders, including from the Victorian Minister for Disability Luke Donnellan, Shadow Federal Minister for NDIS Bill Shorten and more recently from Federal Health Minister Greg Hunt. These high-profile leaders only taken notice because of our collective voice; HACSU members advocating for these issues are to thank for the recognition and great outcomes we have accomplished.
- We saw supply issues throughout April with PPE; the Government is exercising all available options to get access to PPE, including specifically chartered flights; they are taking this issue very seriously.

## Side by Side:

- We're continuing *Side by Side*, our project to contact members across Victoria throughout April; thanks to members we've already spoken with, this has been a positive experience for the union and it's great for us to engage with each other in new ways. Be aware, when we call, it will be a private number – and if you miss us, you can keep up to date with the latest news via the member MyPage.

## Supporting Comrades across Australia:

- HACSU supports the 16,000 Australian workers effected by the current state of Virgin Airlines. You can show your solidarity to these workers and ask the Government to SAVE VIRGIN by [emailing your MP today](#).

## MyPage:

- Familiarise yourself with your personalised HACSU members-only digital space – MyPage! This is where you'll find members-only news, you can update your personal and employment details, find factsheets about your rights at work and access discount shopping at major retailers! <https://mypage.hacsu.asn.au/>



## Resources:

- Worksafe COVID-19 workplace health and safety website [here](#).
- Centre for Mental Health Learning: sign up to the newsletter to receive updates about online training [here](#).
- ACTU resources relating to coronavirus and JobKeeper payments and superannuation <https://www.actu.org.au/coronavirus>
- Prevention of COVID-19 related OHS risks <https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/prevention-and-management-exposure-coronavirus-covid-19-healthcare-and-social-assistance-industry>
- Are you a mental health worker with lived experience of mental illness or ill-health? The Big Feels Club is a 5-part online audio series dedicated to supporting you. For more information or to register go to: <https://bigfeels.club/big-feels-at-work>

We also wanted to share some feedback we received from some members during the COVID-19 crisis and their experiences of being part of HACSU.

*"I have been a member for many years and would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your hard work and for hard fought entitlements that you have achieved on our behalf. I personally have always felt supported and in safe hands with HACSU".*

*"We've heard from employers and other sources that HACSU members across Victoria are presenting as the most composed and well-informed in this time of repeated change. It's great to hear such fantastic feedback about HACSU members who are standing together at work and supporting each other, as well as supporting other colleagues who aren't yet HACSU members."*

*"We're motivated by your strength and we're ready to come out of this crisis even more resilient and focussed on building a stronger union than we've ever seen, together." – Paul Healey*

We again extend our thanks to all members who are on this journey with us. Times are tough but we have the collective strength of the union around us, and it keeps us pushing forward together.

The HACSU Team have been inundated with requests for support and advice over the past several weeks and months during this pandemic crisis. We want members to know that we're working tirelessly to get back to you and we appreciate your patience in waiting for us to respond. We're serious about providing support and services to members and we're putting measures in place to respond to you sooner.

In unity,

HACSU.