

---

# **Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability**

Outline of steps taken by the Commonwealth of Australia  
in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to  
people with disability

**15 April 2020**

---

## Introduction

- 1 On 26 March 2020, the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (**the Royal Commission**) issued a Statement of Concern titled *The Response to the COVID-19 pandemic for people with disability* (**Statement of Concern**). The Statement of Concern raised a range of matters of priority. They were:
  - (a) Access to health care;
  - (b) Essential support services;
  - (c) Accessible information;
  - (d) Access to food and nutrition;
  - (e) Employment and income security;
  - (f) Reduced oversight in closed residential settings; and
  - (g) First Nations People.
- 2 It is intended that the information in this outline will assist the Royal Commission to understand the breadth of the Commonwealth's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in relation to people with disability, in conjunction with the actions from each state and territory. The Commonwealth is available to provide further assistance to the Royal Commission with any aspect of the matters addressed in this outline or other additional information or detail as requested. It is anticipated that the states and territories will provide the Royal Commission with information about the measures they have also adopted that relate to the matters raised in the Statement of Concern.

---

## Access to health care

- 3 The Royal Commission has expressed a range of concerns about access to healthcare for people with disability during the pandemic. The Royal Commission has indicated the concerns include: barriers to access prevention, screening and treatment for COVID-19, concern about access to medications and therapeutic services; potential lack of access to mental health services, issues with access to personal protective equipment, hand sanitiser and sterilising equipment; concern that discrimination or unconscious bias could impact people with disability access to critical lifesaving health care; and concern about the wellbeing of people with disability who do not have access to Medicare-funded services.
- 4 The Australian Government is committed to ensuring people with disability and their families and carers have equitable access to health care during the COVID-19 pandemic, including accessible health and social care advice, and access to essential supports and services.
- 5 The Chief Medical Officer of the Australian Government Department of Health (**Department of Health**) has established an Advisory Committee to oversee the development and implementation of an Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Management and Operational Plan for People with Disability (**the Plan**). The Plan will form part of the Australian Health Sector

Emergency Response Plan for the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). Once approved a copy of the Plan will be provided to the Royal Commission

**(a) Prevention screening and treatment for COVID-19**

- 6 Since 11 March 2020, the Australian Government has been expanding the availability of telehealth services funded under the Medicare Benefits Schedule (**MBS**). Telehealth services are helping to contain the spread of COVID-19 by facilitating social distancing while maintaining access to clinical care where this is feasible by videoconference or telephone.<sup>1</sup> This includes services provided by general practitioners, specialists and allied health practitioners. The provision of these MBS items provides greater flexibility for the delivery of healthcare services and minimises transportation needs.
- 7 On 16 March 2020, the Australian Government made available online infection prevention and control (**IPC**) training for care workers across the health, aged care, disability and other sectors titled: “How to protect yourself and the people you are caring for from infection with COVID-19”. As at 7am on 13 April 2020, over 482,900 people had completed the course.
- 8 The Plan will form part of the Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) and will ensure the health care needs of people with disability, their families, carers and support workers can be met during the pandemic, including access to coronavirus screening, prevention and health care.

**(b) Access to medications and therapeutic services**

- 9 On 11 March 2020, the Australian Government announced measures to improve access to medications for all Australians, which will support access to medications for people with disability. This included \$25 million for electronic prescribing and home medicine services to enable people to have their prescriptions filled online or remotely and delivered to their homes.
- 10 In relation to therapeutic services, in addition to the MBS telehealth services outlined above, the Department of Health is working with the allied health sector to develop IPC protocols to help support the safe continuation of face to face allied health services, both in the clinic and in home-based settings.

**(c) Access to mental health services**

- 11 The Australian Government recognises that people with disability face a greater risk of adverse mental health outcomes, including in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 12 As part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, on 29 March 2020 the Government announced a \$74 million package over 2019-20 and 2020-21 to support the mental health and wellbeing of all Australians, including people with a disability, their families and carers, such as:

---

<sup>1</sup> The telehealth services must be bulk billed for vulnerable patients such as Commonwealth concession card holders, children under 16 years old and patients who are more vulnerable to COVID-19.

- Dedicated Coronavirus digital resources and a phone counselling service led by Beyond Blue and staffed by accredited mental health professionals.
- Funding to bolster critical phone and online support services, including Lifeline and Kids Helpline. Extra funding will bolster other existing services including digital peer-support to people with urgent, severe and complex mental illness who may be experiencing additional distress.
- Headspace will expand its digital work and study service, to help younger Australians stay on track in their education and training and prepare them for the workforce.
- A targeted mental health communications campaign as part of the broader Coronavirus communications campaign. This will include wide-ranging advertising, social media engagement, education and awareness initiatives to keep the conversation going about mental health as the full impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic emerge.
- Continued expansion of the resources provided on the Government’s digital mental health gateway Head to Health ([www.headtohealth.gov.au/covid-19-support](http://www.headtohealth.gov.au/covid-19-support)), giving people access to trusted mental health information and services.
- Additional funding to continue transition support for remaining Commonwealth community mental health clients under the National Psychosocial Support – Transition initiative to the National Disability Insurance Scheme or to Continuity of Support arrangements.

**(d) Access to health supplies including PPE, hand sanitiser and sterilising equipment**

- 13 Due to global shortages of personal protective equipment (**PPE**), distribution of PPE from the National Medical Stockpile continues to be triaged and managed by the Department of Health. The National Medical Stockpile’s primary role is to supplement state and territory access to essential equipment and pharmaceuticals during a health emergency. The highest priority of the Government is to ensure access to masks and other PPE for frontline staff in public hospitals, GPs, pharmacies, as well as those most vulnerable to the virus including through Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Organisations (ACCHOs), aged care and disability care facilities.
- 14 Since early April 2020, PPE including surgical masks, have been made available in limited quantities from the National Medical Stockpile to support services to people with disability in accordance with protocols to prioritise those most in need. This is an equivalent arrangement as for the aged care sector. Access to any PPE is based on an established need in line with clinical evidence, for example to assist to manage an outbreak of COVID-19 at a facility. Requests for access based on the above scenarios can be made to the Department of Health through a dedicated email address and distribution from the Stockpile to disability providers will be supported by the National Disability Insurance Agency (**NDIA**).

- 15 The NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (**NDIS Commission**) has issued a fact sheet to provide information to providers and support workers on the use of PPE, including information on how providers can access PPE.<sup>2</sup> As additional stocks of PPE become available<sup>3</sup>, consideration may be given to whether any changes can be made to those needs-based protocols to further extend access.

**(e) Access to critical and lifesaving health care**

- 16 The Australia New Zealand Intensive Care Society (**ANZICS**) a Specialist Society of the Royal College of Physicians has prepared Guidelines for COVID-19 which aim to provide a series of recommendations and suggestions to ensure continued high-quality clinical care in the setting of a pandemic. In response to concerns raised by the Advisory Committee, the chair of the Advisory Committee has made representations to ANZICS about the importance of adopting a human rights-based approach that meets the needs of people with disability. The Department of Health understands the guidelines are currently being updated.

**(f) People who are not eligible for Medicare-funded services**

- 17 The Australian Government's focus is to ensure the capacity of the Australian health system to effectively assess, diagnose and treat people with COVID-19 in a way that minimises the spread of the virus in Australia and protects the most vulnerable. Australia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to consider the health implications of the outbreak for all people currently in Australia.
- 18 As part of the National Partnership on COVID-19 Response, the Australian Government will fund 50 per cent of the costs incurred by State Governments in diagnosing and treating people who are suspected or confirmed of having COVID-19 in their public health and hospital systems including those who are ineligible for Medicare (where not covered for example by travel insurance or private health insurance). Additionally, GP respiratory clinics will not charge patients and will assess patients whether or not they hold a Medicare card.

---

## **Essential support services**

- 19 The Royal Commission has called on governments to develop strategies to ensure access to essential services, including where a usual provider becomes unwell and to reduce the risk of infection in closed and/or congregated settings and in support of that goal, to ensure support workers are properly trained. The Australian Government is undertaking a range of activities to develop and implement strategies to support the delivery of essential services.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020-03/fact-sheet-covid-19-provider-information-about-ppe.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> There is a global shortage of PPE and efforts are being made to acquire additional stocks on international markets by the Department of Health in close collaboration with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Commonwealth is also supporting the development of Australia's domestic PPE manufacturing capacity through targeted work being led by the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources.

**(a) Access to essential services, including alternative supports**

20 The Australian Government is closely monitoring the COVID-19 situation to identify and respond quickly to any gaps that may arise in the continuity of disability support services. Actions the Australian Government is taking include:

- **Proactive identification of persons who may be at risk for follow up.** The Australian Government has shared data with states and territories in relation to identified high-risk National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants. The NDIA is contacting 62,000 identified vulnerable NDIS participants by telephone to check that they are still receiving and accessing their key NDIS supports. The Department of Social Services (DSS) is funding the advocacy peak, Disability Advocacy Network Australia, to coordinate the sector to proactively reach out to their clients, particularly those that do not have support, liaise with key stakeholders and report to the department and other relevant entities of the issues that advocates identify.
- **Empowering participants.** The NDIS Commission has provided information to participants about what to expect from their providers during the COVID-19 pandemic response period,<sup>4</sup> and is supporting providers in business continuity planning.
- **Mandating providers to report.** The NDIS Commission requires registered NDIS providers to report to it if providers become aware of significant impacts on their ability to continue to provide services and supports to NDIS participants.<sup>5</sup> The NDIS Commission has written to registered NDIS providers reminding them of these obligations<sup>6</sup>. The NDIS Commission has confirmed that it is receiving notifications from providers regarding changed circumstances that may affect aspects of their operations. When these notifications are received, the NDIS Commission triages each notification and works through existing protocols with the NDIA to facilitate continuity of support for participants.
- **Minimising burden on providers to ensure they can focus on supports.** The NDIS Commission has extended re-registration processes so providers do not need to either initiate audits within the previously required timeframes or complete re-registrations which they may have commenced. These arrangements will apply until the NDIS Commission is satisfied that continuing with re-registration and audit processes will not unreasonably hamper providers' COVID-19 response capacity. The NDIS Commission is also streamlining some aspects of reportable incident notifications to ensure that such notifications can be made in a way that is less resource intensive for providers. To further assist providers with increased costs at this time, including costs related to PPE, the NDIA has increased the price limits for core

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020-03/fact-sheet-covid-19-ndis-participant-information.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020-03/fact\\_sheet\\_what\\_ndis\\_commission\\_doing.pdf](https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020-03/fact_sheet_what_ndis_commission_doing.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020-03/200324-notice-covid-19-related-events-and-changes.pdf>

supports and services (eg, assistance with daily living, social and community participation, capacity building) by 10%.

- **Co-ordinating alternative supports.** Where gaps in continuity of disability support services are identified, the NDIA, together with state and territory agencies, will coordinate alternative supports for people with disability. The NDIA has partnered with existing online disability employment platforms to link NDIS participants with available support workers and is seeking to match displaced workers in other industries to job opportunities within the disability sector.<sup>7</sup>
- **Supporting alternative models of service delivery.** National Disability Advocacy Program organisations are responding flexibly to the needs of their existing clients and other people in their communities to protect their mental and physical health. They have developed alternative delivery models from telephone and internet interactions to visits to clients that still allow social distancing measures to be observed.

21 The Council of Australian Governments Disability Reform Council agreed on 9 April to expedite work to develop a NDIS workforce plan in light of the challenges posed by COVID-19. This plan is expected to be finalised out-of-session prior to the Council's next meeting.

**(b) Measures to support infection control including training for carers and support workers**

22 The Australian Government recognises that the COVID-19 pandemic is an evolving situation and that additional measures to reduce infections may be considered necessary as the situation develops. The NDIS Commission has targeted communications to participants and providers and implemented several measures to enhance protections for NDIS participants. These measures include:

- rolling out online infection prevention and control training for COVID-19 to NDIS providers in conjunction with the Department of Health, to ensure support workers understand the basics about the COVID-19 virus, including how it spreads and how to protect participants. As noted above, the online IPC training for care workers has been made available with very high take up. 47,647 of the 482,900 people who have completed the training identified themselves as disability care workers;
- including COVID-19 outbreaks as a notifiable event for registered NDIS providers;
- providing information to providers on the use of PPE so that providers understand when PPE should be used<sup>8</sup>, prioritisation and updates on availability and supply;
- providing information to providers about behaviour support and restrictive practices in response to COVID-19 and social distancing and isolation requirements; and
- providing advice to NDIS stakeholders about obtaining the influenza vaccine.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ndis.gov.au/coronavirus/finding-support-workers>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020-03/fact-sheet-covid-19-provider-information-about-ppe.pdf>

- 23 The NDIS Commission has also established COVID-19 webpages to group this information and action together for providers and participants,<sup>9</sup> with a separate dedicated page for participants,<sup>10</sup> including links to other key websites, information and resources.

**(c) Communication and collaboration and other measures**

- 24 The NDIA has been responsive to feedback from stakeholders and providers about the needs of NDIS participants. This has caused the NDIA to find alternative and innovative ways to connect with participants. For example, the NDIA has expanded the functionality of the webchat feature on its website to allow National Contact Centre Staff to verify a participant's identity, access their account in its Customer Relationship Management system and to have personalised discussions with participants about their supports.
- 25 The NDIA has also updated guidance for Planners and Local Area Co-Ordinators to operationalise new arrangements to support participants during COVID-19.

---

## **Accessible information**

- 26 The Royal Commission has called on Australian governments to ensure information is made available in an accessible way including the use of Auslan interpreters, providing written material in accessible formats including to people with more limited supports or to persons who do not have access to the internet. The Australian Government has adopted a range of measures to make information available in an accessible format and is working with the disability sector and communications experts to ensure people with disability have timely access to information.

**(a) Closed captioning and Auslan**

- 27 The *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* establishes a captioning regime for programs that are broadcast on free-to-air and subscription television. Relevantly, broadcasters must, between 6:00am and midnight every day, caption programs including all news and current affairs programs that are broadcast on main channels. In addition, commercial, national and subscription television services must comply with the captioning quality standard made by the Australian Communications and Media Authority, transmit emergency warnings in the form of text and speech and, where practicable, caption those warnings.
- 28 In relation to Auslan, FreeTV Australia maintains a series of advisory notes which are designed to help and encourage members of the commercial free-to-air television broadcasting industry to understand and be responsive to a range of matters, including emergency broadcasts. The maintenance of these advisory notes is a requirement under the *Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice*. The *Broadcast of Emergency Information* advisory note provides that free-to-air broadcasters will include Auslan interpreters in the frame or take all reasonable steps to include the interpreter in the camera shot and in a manner where the interpreter can be clearly seen in emergency

---

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/resources/coronavirus-covid-19-information>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/participants/covid-19-people-disability>

announcements.<sup>11</sup> In the context of the COVID-19 situation, the Commonwealth has sought to have an Auslan interpreter at all live Prime Ministerial press conferences for issues of national significance. In addition, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) publishes transcripts of all Prime Ministerial press conferences, interviews and statements shortly after those events have concluded.

- 29 DSS has made available on its website an Auslan video and easy read documents which outline information about COVID-19. The information includes details about available supports for people with disability and their carers and the importance of health and social distancing prevention strategies.<sup>12</sup>

**(b) Accessible formats**

- 30 The Australian Government is undertaking a nationwide public information campaign which includes a \$30 million advertising campaign, regular nationwide text messages with advice, as well as a new website which will contain all relevant information in one place. The Australia.gov.au website also has associated social media accounts and services to connect people with the right information including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, WhatsApp and Instagram.
- 31 The Australia.gov.au website directs people to information on other websites such as the DSS website and also links to the Department of Health, the Carer Gateway, the NDIA and NDIS Commission websites.
- 32 The DSS website contains information about COVID-19 aimed at people with disability and their families and carers and includes the details of the new Disability Information Helpline. As described at 31 above, the DSS website currently provides COVID-19 information in accessible formats including an Auslan video and easy read documents and additional accessible resources will be developed in close consultation with the disability sector in the coming weeks.
- 33 DSS also has planned targeted communication activities, which will be made available in the coming weeks. Material will be developed in conjunction with the disability sector and others to raise awareness, support and inform people with disability, their families and carers about the specific supports and services that are available to them.
- 34 In addition, disability peak organisations funded by the Australian Government are engaging with their members and government, disseminating information in relation to COVID-19 and reprioritising their work to focus on COVID-19 concerns, consistent with the objectives of their funding arrangements.
- 35 The NDIA has published information packs in a range of accessible formats (including Auslan videos, animations and in a range of languages), including the following packs:
- Coronavirus: Changes to the way the NDIS works; and
  - Coronavirus: Helping our participants stay safe and well.

---

<sup>11</sup> A copy of the Advisory Note can be accessed at <https://www.freetv.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/FINAL-Amended-Advisory-Note-Emergency-Information-12-June.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> See <https://www.dss.gov.au/disabilityhelp>

- 36 The NDIA has also published and will continue to update the frequently asked questions section on its webpage to assist participants to understand the effects of any planning changes and other changes and initiatives that are related to COVID-19.
- 37 At present, the NDIA’s COVID-19 page is averaging 85,000 visitors a day.
- 38 The NDIS Commission’s COVID-19 fact sheet for NDIS participants is available in Easy Read and Auslan formats. The NDIS Commission has also provided links to Easy Read resources produced by the Council for Intellectual Disability, as well as links to the NDIA’s dedicated webpage and key Australian Government sites, on the NDIS Commission’s “Coronavirus (COVID-19) information for people with disability” webpage.

**(c) Minimal support and no internet**

- 39 The Royal Commission has called on all governments to develop and action a strategy to disseminate information to people who do not have access to the internet. The Australian Government has implemented a range of measures to disseminate information about COVID-19 to people who do not have access to the internet.
- 40 The Department of Health has established the National Coronavirus Helpline. The helpline is available to anyone seeking information about COVID-19 and operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.<sup>13</sup> In addition to the National Coronavirus Helpline, DSS has established the Disability Information Helpline, a dedicated 1800 phone line that people with disability can contact to discuss any concerns they may have in relation to COVID-19. The Disability Information Helpline is available Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm (AEST) and Saturday and Sunday 9am to 7pm (AEST), and can refer people to advocacy, counselling, and other supports they may need including a trauma counsellor for longer-term, ongoing support if a person is experiencing distress.<sup>14</sup>
- 41 Further to these measures, and as outlined at 32 above, DSS are also implementing a number of targeted communications not relying on the internet including hard copy flyers, telephone calls, radio and print.

---

## **Access to food and nutrition**

- 42 The Royal Commission has commended business for putting in place measures to ensure people with disability have priority access to essential food and nutrition during the crisis. A range of measures adopted by the Australian Government support the efforts to ensure people with disability have access to food and nutrition.

**(a) Facilitating priority access to home delivery**

- 43 The NDIA has worked with major supermarket retailers to establish an arrangement that ensures NDIS participants are given priority access to grocery home delivery services. Priority access means that NDIS participants are eligible to receive home

---

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.health.gov.au/contacts/national-coronavirus-helpline>

<sup>14</sup> See <https://www.dss.gov.au/disabilityhelp>

delivered grocery items before the general public. This arrangement has been available to NDIS participants since 6 April 2020 in those locations where participating supermarkets operate delivery services.<sup>15</sup>

### **(b) Additional support for charities and community organisations**

- 44 Emergency Relief can act as a safety net for people experiencing financial hardship and who have limited means to help them alleviate their financial crisis. The type of assistance offered by Emergency Relief providers may include food, clothing, vouchers, budgeting assistance and referral to other services.
- 45 On 29 March 2020, the Australian Government announced an additional \$200 million to support charities and other community organisations in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. This funding included \$17 million that was immediately available in 2019-20 for Commonwealth-funded Emergency Relief providers and \$16 million that was immediately available in 2019-20 for the three Commonwealth-funded Food Relief providers namely, Foodbank Australia, OzHarvest and SecondBite.

---

## **Employment and income security**

- 46 The Royal Commission has encouraged governments to include people with disability in all measures aimed at protecting financial security during the pandemic including issues arising out of remote working practices and access to supports and stimulus measures. The Australian Government recognises that people with disability face disadvantages in the labour market and that these challenges will be compounded by decreasing employment opportunities and an increased number of job seekers due to COVID-19.

### **(a) Employment**

- 47 There has been additional funding and modifications have been made to program delivery to support employment services for people with disabilities. Additionally, measures have been taken to facilitate the provision of immediate assistance to participants.
- **Program delivery:** A suite of flexible arrangements has been introduced that will support providers of jobactive and Disability Employment Service (DES) to operate effectively in the current circumstances. These arrangements include delivering employment services via telephone, adjusting operating hours and allowing staff to work from home.
  - **Advance payments:** All jobactive and DES providers have been offered an advance payment of six weeks of service fees. It is expected that this advance payment will assist providers to maintain their existing capacity to support people who are currently employed and to ensure that other people are ready for new opportunities as the labour market begins to improve.

---

<sup>15</sup> See: <https://www.ndis.gov.au/coronavirus/priority-home-delivery-services>

- **Additional funding:** The Australian Government has allocated additional funding of \$24.5 million for this financial year to the Temporary Viability Support (TVS) program. This additional funding has increased the total TVS funding to \$27.5 million and will support Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) who provide employment opportunities for people with intellectual and cognitive disabilities and to help them maintain employment. It is also anticipated that in the next financial year a further \$3.2 million will be dedicated to ADEs to extend the Supported Wage System (SWS) supplementation to 37 ADEs who currently pay their supported employees the SWS wage.
- **Mutual obligations:** All mutual obligation requirements have been suspended up to and including 27 April 2020 to support job seekers through this difficult period and to reduce congestion in a period of high demand for Government services. This means that participants in jobactive and DES are not required to attend appointments or activities but are encouraged to stay connected to their provider. These arrangements will continue to be reviewed regularly.
- **Workplace modifications:** So that employees with disability can continue to receive assistance for workplace modifications and Auslan services, the Australian government has implemented alternative arrangements and will, where practical, consider applications for access to the Employment Assistance Fund without requiring the usual physical assessment in the workplace. The Australian Government will also allow employers to pay a productivity-based wage that matches a person's assessed productivity rate.

**(b) Income security**

48 The Australian Government is supporting people with disability through the social security system.

- **DSP and Carer Payment:** Eligible pensioners, including people who receive the DSP and Carer Payment will receive an Economic Support Payment of \$750. From 31 March 2020, this payment was automatically paid by Services Australia into the same bank account that the person's pension payment is paid into. A second Economic Support Payment of \$750 will be paid to eligible pensioners from 13 July 2020. As these payments are made automatically, DSP and Carer Payment recipients do not need to contact Centrelink to receive them.
- The Government has also suspended participation requirements for DSP until 27 April 2020. This means during this period no compliance action will be taken for those who do not meet mutual obligations.
- **JobSeeker:** For people who have recently lost their job due to COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian Government has doubled the JobSeeker payment through the introduction of a six-month temporary coronavirus supplement of \$550 per fortnight. Eligible recipients will receive the Coronavirus Supplement from 27 April 2020 along with their usual payment. The Government has also temporarily put in place expanded eligibility and qualification criteria for the JobSeeker Payment and Youth Allowance to allow more people to apply.

- **JobKeeper:** On 30 March 2020, the Australian Government introduced the JobKeeper payment to assist businesses to retain and support their employees. Businesses with an annual turnover of less than \$1 billion are eligible for this payment if their turnover will be reduced by 30% or more while businesses with an annual turnover of \$1 billion or more will be eligible if their turnover will be reduced by 50%. Registered charities will be eligible if their turnover (including deductible gifts) will be reduced by 15% or more. The government will make fortnightly payments of \$1,500 per eligible employee to the business.

---

## Reduced oversight in closed residential settings

- 49 The Royal Commission has expressed concern about the wellbeing of people with disability living within closed residential facilities, which may be further impacted by measures to support social distancing to reduce infection. The NDIS Commission is continuing to exercise its functions, including in relation to reportable incidents and complaints, during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the NDIS Commission has taken the following actions specifically in relation to COVID-19, which are relevant to quality and safeguarding in connection with NDIS supports and services, including those provided in residential settings:
- providing information for participants on what to expect from providers during the pandemic response period;
  - including COVID-19 outbreaks as a notifiable event for registered NDIS providers; and
  - supporting providers in business continuity planning. Registered NDIS providers must report to the NDIS Commission when they become aware of significant impacts on their ability to continue to provide services and supports to NDIS participants.
- 50 Community Visitors are the responsibility of the states and territories. Each state and territory retains the power to make orders regarding social distancing which could impact on the community visitors accessing supported disability accommodation and group homes, which has been exercised by individual states and territories with variable impact.<sup>16</sup>

---

## Access to education

- 51 The Australian Government acknowledges the risks to students with disability during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Education and Employment Sector Pandemic Preparedness Committee (**the Committee**), chaired by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, was established on 6 March 2020. The Committee convenes weekly with senior officials from the Australian Government, state and territory education and training authorities and peak body representatives. It focuses on national coordination and ensuring consistent information sharing, and where possible, consistent responses relevant to the COVID-19 situation. Members of the Committee

---

<sup>16</sup> See for example:  
<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/202004/Direction%20-%20Care%20Facilities%20%28signed%29.pdf>

unanimously agree that educational continuity for all children and students is a high priority during any shut down or disruption of service.

- 52 The COAG Education Council met on 7 April 2020, and all state and territory education ministers endorsed for the consideration of National Cabinet a set of national principles to support continued delivery of high-quality school education for all students during the COVID-19 pandemic. All education ministers have committed to ensuring that every student will have access to education in a sustainable and effective manner. How this is manifested will vary and may include remote flexible online delivery and/or physical attendance.
- 53 Importantly, all government and non-government schools have been encouraged to continue to provide an on-campus option for those children who are not able to learn at home, including vulnerable children, children with a disability and the children of essential workers.
- 54 Responsibility for ensuring students receive reasonable adjustments in accordance with the Disability Standards for Education 2005 continues to rest with education authorities and education and training providers.
- 55 The Australian Government is committed to ensuring that families can continue to access quality early childhood education and care. The Commonwealth's Early Childhood Education and Care Relief Package announced on 2 April 2020 means families can access free early childhood education and care services from Monday 6 April 2020 until the end of the financial year. The Commonwealth has also committed an additional \$453.2 million to support states and territories in continuing to provide universal access to preschool throughout 2021.
- 56 The Australian Government's Inclusion Support Program, which aims to support services to include children with additional needs, particularly children with disability, will also continue to operate throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

---

## First Nations people with disability

- 57 The Royal Commission has called on Australian governments to ensure that further responses to the pandemic include specific strategies to protect First Nations People. The Royal Commission welcomed the recent announcement to provide 110 grants to help remote First Nations communities prepare for an outbreak of COVID-19. The Australian Government acknowledges the increased risk that all First Nations people, and in particular First Nations people with disability face due to COVID-19. The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) is working closely with DSS and the Department of Health to provide an Indigenous policy lens to the COVID-19 response for people with a disability.
- 58 In relation to **access to health care and funding**, the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with a disability are being considered as part of the development of the Plan. It is envisaged that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability will be involved in the refinement of the Plan.

- 59 The Australian Government has also announced other measures and funding to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's access to health care, including:
- \$57.8 million to support remote communities to minimise the likelihood of exposure to COVID-19, undertake preparedness planning, increase capacity to evacuate early cases, and enable an effective response if an outbreak occurs;
  - eligibility and encouragement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services to become GP-led respiratory clinics as part of the Government's \$206.7 million commitment to deliver up to 100 GP-led respiratory clinics across the country in providing dedicated services to people with mild to moderate respiratory symptoms; and
  - to ensure the cultural safety of all GP-led respiratory clinics, \$6.9 million has been allocated to the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, its sector support organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Services to coordinate Australia's COVID-19 response efforts, including to ensure cultural safety across all GP respiratory clinics.
- 60 More broadly, the Australian Government has announced a number of measures targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people which people with disability will also have access to, including:
- **Communications:** On 5 April 2020, the Minister for Indigenous Australians announced that the Australian Government would provide \$234,500 this financial year to the First Nations Media Australia to extend their production and transmission of culturally appropriate, accessible and accurate COVID-19 health and safety messages to Indigenous communities.
  - **Food and nutrition:** The Minister for Indigenous Australians is also examining ways to ensure a reliable supply of essential goods, groceries, pharmaceuticals and other critical supplies to Indigenous communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. On 8 April 2020, the Minister for Indigenous Australians hosted a roundtable discussion with Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, the Hon Michael Gunner and representatives from Indigenous store management organisations and key supermarket chains. To support this work, the NIAA has established a dedicated Food Security Working Group that is closely monitoring specific issues that are particular to regional and remote Australia.
  - **Infection control:** The NIAA and the Department of Health are also working closely with state and territory governments to prevent the spread of COVID-19 into remote Indigenous communities by implementing travel restrictions under the *Commonwealth Biosecurity Act 2015*. Designated remote areas have been nominated in consultation with communities and any person seeking to enter a designated remote area must undertake a mandatory 14-day period of isolation before they can enter these areas. Local decision-makers may provide exemptions in special circumstances (for example, to provide essential services such as health care and support for people with disability).

- **Community preparedness:** On 2 April 2020, the Minister for Indigenous Australians, the Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP, announced the Commonwealth would provide \$123 million for targeted measures to support Indigenous businesses and communities to increase their responses to COVID-19.
- 61 Finally, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group on COVID-19 has developed, and the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee has endorsed, the *Management Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Populations* (Management Plan). This Management Plan outlines the key issues and consideration in planning, response and management for COVID-19 to be addressed by all levels of government, in collaboration with impacted communities and other key partners and stakeholders.