



The Hon. Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister

STATEMENT

Friday 21 August 2020

NATIONAL CABINET

The National Cabinet met today to discuss Australia's economic recovery, Australia's COVID-19 health and aged care responses and the Victorian outbreak.

The Acting Chief Medical Officer, Professor Paul Kelly, provided an update on the measures underway, the latest data and health advice in relation to COVID-19.

There have been over 24,000 confirmed cases in Australia and sadly 472 people have died.

The outbreak in Victoria has meant that there are now around 5,000 active cases in Australia. Daily infection rates have remained low in all states and territories, other than Victoria. At the national level testing remains high, with more than 5.5 million tests undertaken.

National Cabinet recommitted to providing as much support as necessary to Victoria during this very difficult time. The National Cabinet noted the advice from Professor Kelly that the epidemiological situation in Victoria had improved and the numbers of cases in Victoria has reduced from its peak.

National Cabinet again agreed the need to continue to have the right controls in place to test more people, trace those who test positive and contain local outbreaks when they occur. These are fundamental to reducing the spread of the virus.

Seven of Australia's eight states and territories are successfully implementing the suppression strategy for COVID-19, with the goal of no community transmission, enabling Australians in those jurisdictions to live and work in a COVID-safe economy.

National Cabinet agreed to release a weekly set of data on the common operating picture of COVID-19 responses across states and territories.

National Cabinet discussed the updated economic outlook following the additional restrictions imposed in Victoria and the changes to the JobKeeper program announced in response to these restrictions.

The Governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia, Philip Lowe, and the Treasury Secretary, Steven Kennedy, provided National Cabinet with an economic update. Both reiterated that the biggest economic challenge that faces Australia is jobs and unemployment.

The Governor outlined there is a need for a coordinated focus from all levels of government on three key areas:

1. Income support programs which includes the substantial investments already made in JobKeeper and JobSeeker;
2. Investments in our physical capital including infrastructure and human capital via skills and training; and
3. Greater ease of doing business through lower and efficient taxes and less regulation

Combined with the health response, the Commonwealth economic and balance sheet measures now total more than \$314 billion, and along with the response from the state and territories of \$48 billion, significant economic support is flowing into the economy.

Given the economic challenges, the Governor called on state and territory governments to provide more fiscal support, with additional support of 2 per cent of GDP, or around \$40 billion over two years, needed from states and territories to support economic growth. Mr Lowe outlined that this expenditure needs to be purposeful and achieve the maximum economic dividend, and not lead to permanent or structural increases in government expenditure.

National Cabinet also noted progress made on skills reform and that all states and territories have now signed the Heads of Agreement for the \$1 billion Skills and JobTrainer Programme.

Aged Care Emergency Response Plan

National Cabinet endorsed the *Commonwealth, State and Territory Plan to Boost Aged Care Preparedness for a Rapid Emergency Response to COVID-19 Plan*.

Noting that there were existing protocols and arrangements between states and the Commonwealth that were effective and worked well in support of aged care preparedness, National Cabinet agreed that in the event of significant change in circumstances, particularly with respect to community transmission of COVID-19, either the relevant jurisdiction or the Commonwealth would be able to initiate the establishment of emergency response centres on a bilaterally agreed basis.

The Plan will strengthen the preparedness for responding to a rapid escalation of COVID-19 in the aged care sector. It includes a high-level series of actions for Commonwealth, state and territory Governments to strengthen aged care emergency response preparedness. These actions include:

- Ongoing assessment of the preparedness of aged care providers to respond to outbreaks of COVID-19, including a risk profiling tool developed by the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission to inform emergency response planning;
- An audit of State and Territory Emergency Response Capabilities to support the establishment of a joint aged care emergency response;
- Additional face to face infection control training.

The National Cabinet also endorsed a guide to assist in the establishment of an Aged Care Health Emergency Response Operations Centre should it be required in the future in other states and territories. These Operations Centres will supplement and boost capacity to respond to outbreaks of COVID-19 in residential aged care settings. They will be consistent and complementary to, and fully

integrated with Commonwealth and state/territory public health and aged care emergency response arrangements. National Cabinet acknowledged that these arrangements are not currently required.

A time-limited AHPPC Aged Care Advisory Group will be established to support the national public health emergency response to COVID-19 in aged care. The Advisory Group will bring together expertise about the aged care sector, infection control, emergency preparedness and public health response.

The Commonwealth Government will provide \$171 million in additional support to the Aged Care Sector to increase national preparedness and respond to the State of Disaster in Victoria which brings the Commonwealth's Aged Care COVID-19 response to over \$1 billion in support.

Support includes:

- Victorian Aged Care Response Centre - \$9.1 million to support a coordinated response between the Commonwealth and Victorian Government agencies to fight COVID-19 in Residential Aged Care.
- Aged Care COVID-19 Preparedness - an additional \$103.4 million to:
 - increase nation-wide workforce surge support for aged care providers experiencing a COVID-19 outbreak;
 - activate national emergency call centre surge capability to support communication efforts with residents' families;
 - fund compressed training for new workers;
 - cover quarantine costs for interstate staff deployed for workforce surge; and
 - strengthen the capacity to support aged care residents and their families with the grief and trauma associated with a COVID-19 outbreak.
- Supporting Aged Care Quality and Safety Monitoring for Aged Care Services - an additional \$9 million to ensure quality care is maintained by supporting the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission to continue its critical work supporting aged care providers across the country to prepare for and respond to COVID-19 outbreaks
- Aged Care Workforce - a further \$50.6 million to be provided to extend funding for the second instalment of the aged care workforce retention payment, due to be paid in September 2020.

Mental Health

National Cabinet discussed the impact of the pandemic on key wellbeing and safety outcomes, including mental health, online safety and family and domestic violence, and noted the increase in contact with crisis helplines. National Cabinet agreed to continue to work together to monitor these areas and continue to track areas of concern and to share data.

Vaccine Strategy

National Cabinet welcomed the Commonwealth Government's COVID-19 Vaccine and Treatment Strategic Approach and the in principle agreement in place between the Commonwealth and AstraZeneca for the supply of the Oxford COVID-19 vaccine for Australians, once safety and efficacy had been proven.

Further the Prime Minister updated National Cabinet on the advanced progress of further arrangements for research and development, vaccine supply and manufacturing including the Commonwealth and Queensland Government funded University of Queensland - CSL, molecular clamp vaccine.

Domestic Border Management

National Cabinet noted some recent changes by states and territories to make it easier for Australians to cross borders, subject to restrictions, and access essential services and activities.

National Cabinet noted discussions had commenced on an Agriculture Workers Code and agreed further work be undertaken by Agriculture Ministers so that a paper could be considered by National Cabinet at its next meeting. The Agriculture Workers Code, will provide for a nationally-consistent approach that would be enforced by relevant states and territories through their Public Health Orders and emergency management measures. It would apply to individuals with occupations deemed critical to ensure the continuity of the agricultural sector.

National Cabinet also agreed that the AHPPC develop a common understanding to define a hotspot and consider movement restrictions relating to a hotspot.

Pacific Labour Scheme and Seasonal Workers

National Cabinet agreed to resume the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) and Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) to help with workforce shortages. The approach has been informed by the trial recruitment of Pacific workers in the Northern Territory to address labour shortages affecting mango farmers. States and territories will decide whether to access the arrangement.

Employing Australians remains a priority for all Governments. Employers can only recruit through the Pacific labour mobility programs if they can demonstrate they cannot find suitable Australian workers through labour market testing.

Protecting Australian and Pacific workers from COVID-19 is also a key priority. States and territories that would like to participate in the arrangement will ensure sufficient health and quarantine system capacity.

National Cabinet will meet again on 4 September 2020.

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