

FACT SHEET

RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Michael O'Brien and his Liberal Nationals team have fulfilled their core role of holding the Victorian Government to account while also putting forward sensible ideas. The areas covered are as follows:

1. Health (pandemic management)

2. Law and safety

3. Household finances

4. Individual assistance

5. Business assistance

6. Transparency and accountability

HEALTH (PANDEMIC MANAGEMENT)

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to implement the following changes relating to contact tracing, hotels for health workers, testing policy, COVID-19 restrictions and the public housing tower lockdown.

- 25 March – Provide a **one-year extension of the terms of hospital board members** who were approaching the end of their terms at 30 June to ensure board continuity and stability.
- 1 April – Deliver **priority access to testing** for the agriculture workforce, similar to the provisions made for health workers; and **make Victoria's hotel rooms available** for doctors, nurses and healthcare workers. The Victorian Government subsequently announced that it would make hotel rooms available for healthcare workers.
- 2 April – Urgently explain the **decision to ban all recreational fishing** under Stage 3 restrictions, counter to the policy in other states. (Note that in the second round of Victorian Stage 3 lockdowns which commenced on 9 July, fishing was not banned.)
- 1 May – Reconsider the push for randomly testing 100,000 Victorians by **targeting specific groups of vulnerable and high-risk Victorians** such as the elderly and those in health facilities.
- 20 June – Take responsibility for the surge in Coronavirus cases and not place blame on families.
- 23 June – Fix **unreasonable wait times for COVID-19 testing** of over two hours
- 4 July – **Respect, decency and a full range of social and policing supports** for the 3,000 residents of nine public housing towers across Flemington and North Melbourne that were under hard lockdown.
- 7 July – Provide all resources necessary following reports of a **lack of police, and lack of food supplies and other necessities** for the residents in the locked down towers.
- 12 July – Introduce **new laws to deter and punish** those who deliberately infect others with COVID-19 as have been introduced in New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia.
- 15 July – Employ **tougher measures to deter residents** in the Melbourne lockdown zone from travelling to country areas, noting that it puts lives at risk.
- 19 July – Address the **severe delays by DHHS in tracing the contacts** of confirmed COVID-19 cases which makes it difficult to contain the virus and will drive further outbreaks and longer lockdowns.

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- [22 July](#) – Introduce **further measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19** from metropolitan Victoria to regional Victoria, such as temperature checks at road borders and on V-line services, mandatory face masks on V-line services and better response times from DHHS on test results and contact tracing.
- [26 July](#) – **Provide a dedicated COVID-19 hotline to schools and childcare centres** that are being left in the dark when it comes to knowing exactly what to do when they are presented with a COVID-19 case.
- [28 July](#) – Immediately **provide all public healthcare staff with proper protection gear** following reports that Victorian doctors aren't being supplied adequate protective equipment and are being forced to steal masks or buy their own.

LAW AND SAFETY

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to implement the following changes relating to protective services officers, sentence discounts, the Police Assistance Line, the enforcement of COVID-19 restrictions and CBD protests.

- [4 April](#) – Enable the **temporary redeployment of PSOs** throughout Victoria to areas of need such as shopping centres. On 6 April, the Victorian Government announced it would adopt this Liberal Nationals idea.
- [13 May](#) – Provide better **clarity on COVID-19 social distancing restrictions** so that Victoria Police don't need to seek supervisor approval before issuing a fine for COVID-19 social distancing breaches
- [14 April](#) – Ensure that common sense is applied to the social distancing rules being asked of Victorians so that **fines are only applied where there is a threat** to public health.
- [19 May](#) – Rule out allowing some of Victoria's worst offenders to be **awarded 14 days off their sentence** for following the same COVID-19 lockdown measures required of the rest of the community.
- [19 May](#) – Address the **botched management of the Police Assistance Line (PAL)** which has let down those who are simply trying to do the right thing by reporting breaches of COVID-19 restrictions and quarantine requirements among members of the community. With the public having made over 30,000 reports of COVID-19 breaches via PAL, neither the Chief Commissioner or Police Minister were able to say how many of these reports had resulted in a spot check being conducted or a fine being issued.
- [19 May](#) – Address its failure to provide a clear set of rules during COVID-19 which left **Victoria Police second-guessing themselves and the community paying the price** for Labor's ambiguous and inconsistent shutdown rules.
- [21 May](#) – Ensure that the **PSO presence on train platforms is not a casualty of the pandemic**. If Daniel Andrews wants to expand the role of PSOs, he must employ more rather than removing them from train stations and compromising the safety of commuters. Victorian commuters deserve a visible policing presence and Daniel Andrews must commit to returning two PSOs to all train stations as soon as possible.
- [3 June](#) – Ensure that **COVID-19 restrictions on gatherings are complied with and enforced consistently**, including in relation to planned protest activities.

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- 5 June – Use the State of Emergency powers and **shut down a planned mass protest in the Melbourne CBD** The government failed to shut down this protest and it went ahead on 6 June with approximately 10,000 protesters in attendance.
- 12 June – Acknowledge that the failure to stop a mass CBD protest and ensure fines were issued to participants left Victorians questioning if there is **one set of rules for activists and another set for ordinary Victorians**.
- 6 July – **Bring in the ADF to support law enforcement** in Victoria.
- 19 July – Prevent **Regional Corrections officers from being deployed** to the lockdown zone in metropolitan Melbourne to protect staff from contracting COVID-19 and spreading it within their communities
- 23 July – Properly manage Victoria's corrections system during COVID-19 to prevent thousands of prisoners becoming eligible for up to four 'emergency management days' for each day they are locked down.
A breach at Ravenhall Prison caused 6 major Victorian prisons in Melbourne, Ararat, Langi Kal Kal, Sale, Geelong and Castlemaine being sent into lockdown resulting in a '**get out of jail early' card for 4,000 inmates**'.
- 24 July – Act immediately to prevent **further incidents of apparent breaches of Victoria Police checkpoints** by metropolitan Melbourne residents.

On 15 July the Liberal Nationals wrote to the Fair Work Ombudsman requesting she undertake an investigation into the wide spread allegations of wage underpayment, sham contracting and other illegal behaviour associated with the deployment of security guards as part of Daniel Andrews botched his hotel quarantine program.

HOUSEHOLD FINANCES

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to implement the following changes relating to land tax relief, local council rates relief, freeze on the bin tax, freeze and refund fees and charges, and make changes to bring down utility bills.

- 25 March – Deliver **land tax credits for residential and commercial property owners** who do the right thing and provide rent relief to tenants. On 15 April, the Victorian Government announced it would adopt this policy in part.
 - 27 March – Reconsider the decision to order 125GL of water from the Wonthaggi desalination plant, as such an order would mean **Victorians miss out on a reduction in water bills** when it is most needed.
 - 1 April – Facilitate local government to deliver a **residential rate freeze by local councils** for the 2020-21 financial year, along with immediate rate relief to distressed households.
 - 3 April – Negotiate with Transurban and **cancel the quarterly increase in CityLink tolls** to reduce cost pressures on individuals and businesses.
 - 6 April – Provide immediate relief to Victorian families by **scrapping the Bin Tax increase**, scheduled for 1 July. Following this, the Victorian Government announced on 22 April it would delay the increase until 1 January 2021.
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- [8 April](#) – **Refund campsite fees for the State's Crown land parks and National Parks** to thousands of Victorians who have booked campsites only to find camping off limits during Stage 3 restrictions.
- [1 May](#) – **Protect newly-vulnerable Victorians** from the disconnection of their power supply.

On [15 May](#) – The Liberal Nationals launched **Back to Work and Back in Business**, a comprehensive plan for the Victorian Government to adopt to kick-start the post-COVID economy, including measures to assist Victorian businesses.

INDIVIDUAL ASSISTANCE

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to implement the following changes relating to education, child care, license testing, food supplies and consumer affairs.

- [1 April](#) – Prioritise those who have had their **driving licence tests cancelled** because of the COVID-19 crisis when testing recommences.
- [7 April](#) – **Fund Term 2 fees for kinder programs across Victoria** to help ease the burden on both parents and kinders.
- [7 April](#) – Take full responsibility for ensuring that **all students receive the technological support they need to learn remotely**.
- [22 April](#) – Provide more **support to carers and families of those with special needs** during the COVID-19 pandemic, as gathering restrictions forced the cessation of group support sessions.
- [16 June](#) – Take action on the issue of license testing which has resulted in a **year and a half-long backlog** for people to get their drivers' license.
- [30 June](#) – Ensure that **childcare centres are supported during closure, and affected students are provided with the resources they need**, so they don't miss out on vital learning during this difficult time.
- [2 July](#) – **provide an adequate avenue for Victorian consumers to have their complaints handled**, noting that Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) is responsible for significant parts of the consumer marketplace and the phone lines at CAV have been inoperative since 16 March.
- [21 July](#) – Extend **temporary changes to truck curfews** past 21 September to ensure Victorians can still get quick access to food and medical supplies and there is less risk of panic-buying.
- [24 July](#) – Further clarify the **very strict rules that appear to limit visits by partners to maternity ward mothers** to just 2 hours a day to ensure there is a balance between COVID-19 prevention and the long term mental and health wellbeing of new parents.
- [28 July](#) – Guarantee it will **not stop businesses in Victoria's food supply chain from doing their critical work** keeping supermarket shelves fully stocked, following the Government flagging that it will consider closing meat processors as part of its pandemic response.

On [26 March](#), the Liberal Nationals published the first version of an **Individual Assistance Fact Sheet**, a document to help Victorians understand what type of financial help was available to them and how they might access it. This document has been updated with the latest news throughout both waves of the pandemic.

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BUSINESS ASSISTANCE

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to implement the following changes relating to the federal JobKeeper payment, fees and charges for businesses, WorkCover premiums, farm rates, industrial relations, payroll tax concessions and the Business Support Fund.

- 2 April – **Waive a number of fees** tied to commercial passenger vehicle operators, including taxis.
- 5 April – Exempt the Federal Government's \$1,500-a-fortnight **JobKeeper payments from Victoria's payroll tax**. One month later, on 5 May, the Victorian Government announced it would adopt this Liberal Nationals idea.
- 9 April – Cancel the \$700 million dividend raid from WorkCover and instead **provide relief to distressed businesses**.
- 9 April – **Freeze farm rates** to support farmers struggling with financial pressure caused by both the bushfires and the coronavirus pandemic.
- 17 April – **Waive registration payments** for commercial vehicles grounded as a result of lockdowns.
- 24 April – Make **long service leave more flexible** so that employers and employees can mutually agree to utilise an employee's entitlements.
- 28 April – **Exempt JobKeeper payments from being considered remuneration when calculating WorkCover premiums**. On 5 May, the Victorian Government announced it would adopt this Liberal Nationals idea.
- 30 April – Provide transparency on the **limited number of industry sectors eligible for the Victorian Government's Business Support Fund and expand this support to all industry sectors**. Following this advocacy, the Victorian Government agreed to expand eligibility to all industry sectors.
- 16 June – Provide a clear plan or notice for racing clubs to put in place COVID-safe protocols to allow the **racing industry to get back on track**.
- 1 July – Extend payroll tax concessions following the **Victorian Government's withdrawal of payroll tax concessions** for businesses with payrolls under \$3 million which had expired on 30 June. The only payroll tax relief measure now in place is the ability to defer the amount owing until Q3 2020-21.
- 14 July – Provide better support for struggling small business. The **\$5,000 grant on offer by the Victorian Government falls short** of what Victorian small businesses need to get them through the second round of lockdowns.
- 16 July – Do more to assist struggling business as the unemployment rate **increased in June for the third consecutive month to 7.5 per cent**, up from just 5.2 per cent prior to the pandemic. **Just under 169,000 jobs have been lost since March** in Victoria, with more to come after the reintroduction of restrictions.
- 21 July – Urgently resolve **the ban on seasonal workers crossing into and out of Victoria** which has left Victoria's horticulture sector concerned about the supply of labour.
- 29 July – Work with the South Australia and New South Wales State Government's to **fix the mess at Victoria's borders** and ensure vital goods are able to flow freely across state borders.

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On [24 March](#), the Liberal Nationals published the first version of a **Business Assistance Fact Sheet**, a document to help Victorian business owners understand what type of financial help was available to their business and how they might access it. This document has been updated with the latest news throughout both waves of the pandemic.

On [15 May](#) – The Liberal Nationals launched [Back to Work and Back in Business](#), a comprehensive plan for the Victorian Government to adopt to kick-start the post-COVID economy, including measures to assist Victorian businesses.

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to implement the following transparency and accountability changes.

- [1 April](#) – **Freeze the salaries of all members of Victorian Parliament** ahead of the scheduled pay rise for politicians on 1 July 2020.
- [2 April](#) – Establish a **Joint House Committee of the Victorian Parliament** under the leadership of a non-Government MP to ensure oversight on Victoria's response to COVID-19.
- [6 May](#) – Launch an **independent inquiry** into its handling of the state's then-largest COVID-19 cluster at the Cedar Meats abattoir.
- [19 May](#) – Explain the **failure to advise WorkSafe of the potential exposure** of one of its employees while attending Cedar Meats for a safety inspection.
- [20 May](#) – Rule out spending the government's additional \$24.5 billion in new debt for COVID related matters to fill the government bottomless pit of cost overruns following Labor Minister Jacinta Allan's refusal to rule out that out.
- [3 July](#) – **Resume sittings of Parliament** to ensure that locked down Victorians receive the answers they need about the government failures which have led to the second wave of COVID-19.
- [8 July](#) – Request a **Victoria Police investigation into alleged criminal behaviour** in the management of the Victorian Government's botched hotel quarantine system.
- [14 July](#) – **Stop dodging questions about its hotel quarantine fiasco** after the publication of leaked emails that showed top bureaucrats warned senior Health officials as early as March that the guards employed were ill-equipped for the work.
- [20 July](#) – Explain reports that Victoria Police have been called in to secure and manage Victoria's quarantine hotels and whether **operational deficiencies in the hotel program have been adequately addressed** since Corrections Victoria took control of the program earlier in July.