The background is a deep red color with a white diagonal stripe running from the top-left corner to the bottom-right corner. The red area is filled with a repeating pattern of white line-art icons representing various business and economic concepts, such as gears, globes, handshakes, dollar signs, and buildings.

Business experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic

March to August 2020

September 2020

About Australian Industry Group

The Australian Industry Group (Ai Group®) is a peak employer organisation representing traditional, innovative and emerging industry sectors. We are a truly national organisation which has been supporting businesses across Australia for more than 140 years.

Ai Group is genuinely representative of Australian industry. Together with partner organisations we represent the interests of more than 60,000 businesses employing more than 1 million staff. Our members are small and large businesses in sectors including manufacturing, construction, engineering, transport & logistics, labour hire, mining services, the defence industry, civil airlines and ICT.

Our vision is for a thriving industry and a prosperous community. We offer our membership strong advocacy and an effective voice at all levels of government underpinned by our respected position of policy leadership and political non-partisanship.

With more than 250 staff and networks of relationships that extend beyond borders (domestic and international) we have the resources and the expertise to meet the changing needs of our membership. We provide the practical information, advice and assistance you need to run your business. Our deep experience of industrial relations and workplace law positions Ai Group as Australia's leading industrial advocate.

We listen and we support our members in facing their challenges by remaining at the cutting edge of policy debate and legislative change. We provide solution-driven advice to address business opportunities and risks.

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KEY FINDINGS

This report forms part of a series of monthly reports by Ai Group about Australia's business experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, up to September 2020. Throughout 2020, Ai Group has provided assistance, information and advice to thousands of businesses who are experiencing the consequences of activity restrictions and reductions in income due to this pandemic. As part of this process we have collected detailed feedback from Australian businesses about their experiences, through a range of sources including emails, surveys, web queries, phone calls and (remote) meetings.

This report summarises the impacts, responses and requirements of businesses as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ai Group received around 1,300 reports from businesses about their experiences between March and August 2020. They told us:

1. The most frequently reported impact on business from COVID-19 has been a sharp drop in demand. This tapered off somewhat in July and August, but was replaced by heightened concern about state border closures, Victoria's 'second wave' of COVID-19 cases and restrictions (affecting 19% of all businesses reporting to Ai Group and 32% of Victorian businesses in August) and inability to visit clients. Nationally, production is also being hampered by international and interstate border disruptions to supply chains and freight services. Increased workloads due to new OH&S requirements and increased costs due to PPE, distancing and other measures have also been reported by many businesses, resulting in reduced productivity and/or heightened staff anxiety in the workplace (chapter 2).
2. In response to these impacts, businesses initially focussed on risk mitigation and workplace health and safety. They moved staff to home-based work where possible and developed COVID-19 safety plans. As the crisis wore on, reduced demand and revenue have forced more businesses to cut work hours and/or employment. The support of JobKeeper helped to stem job cuts from May, but did not stop them entirely. From May, businesses shifted towards adjusting work practices, work sites and product offerings to accommodate 'safe working' requirements. In August, their focus shifted to adjusting longer-term business plans and strategies (chapter 3).
3. The unique and rapid nature of this crisis has meant businesses everywhere have required urgent assistance with responding to COVID-19 and to various activity restrictions. In March the most pressing need was for clear, straightforward information and directions. Many businesses also needed practical assistance with international and domestic freight, access to PPE and workforce management. From April, the sharp drop in demand saw more businesses seeking financial support. From August, they needed restrictions eased and more certainty about the path ahead. Many also want a stronger focus from national and state governments on infrastructure development, local procurement and investment (chapter 4).

1. Ai Group assistance to Australian businesses during COVID-19

Ai Group has skilled advisers, business improvement resources and a network of experienced business consultants to assist your business, backed by our 140 years of experience in understanding what drives successful Australian businesses.

Ai Group has launched a dedicated [Coronavirus COVID-19 Advice and Resources](#) hub with resources to help you navigate the pandemic and stay up-to-date with the latest information and advice. This site is being updated daily as issues develop.

The Workplace Advice Line is available to Ai Group members every weekday to provide advice on a range of workplace issues. Phone 1300 55 66 77 (press option 1) 8.30am to 5.30pm (AEST) or email workplaceadvice@aigroup.com.au for a call back.

Supported by Ai Group Workplace Lawyers and our HR experts, the [HR Resource Centre](#) provides comprehensive and practical HR information, advice and resources. The HR Resource Centre is updated regularly and includes numerous resources to assist member businesses to deal with the HR implications of the COVID-19 crisis.

Developed by our WHS experts, the [Health and Safety Resource Centre](#) provides cutting edge tools, information, advice and resources on topics such as safety management, emergency management, risk management and mental health.

The Ai Group [Economics Resource Centre](#) features a range of regular reports, factsheets and research notes about economics trends and issues that affect Australian business and industry, including the highly regarded Economics Weekly, and the Performance of Manufacturing, Services, Construction and Business Indexes.

Ai Group's Business Improvement & Growth Hub ([BIG Hub](#)) has over 200 Fact sheets, self-assessments, checklists and company case studies to identify internal skill gaps, improve company operations and strategy. It also hosts a consultant referral service to help you find quality providers.

Additionally, Ai Group is a proud Delivery Partner of the Australian Government's Entrepreneurs' Programme in Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia. Ai Group's Entrepreneurs' Programme Facilitators are working closely with businesses as they seek to pivot towards new markets, product offerings and ways of doing business. If you are ready to transform your business, the [Entrepreneurs' Programme and Ai Group](#) can help you take the next step. Contact [Ai Group](#) to be connected to an Ai Group Entrepreneurs' Programme Facilitator.

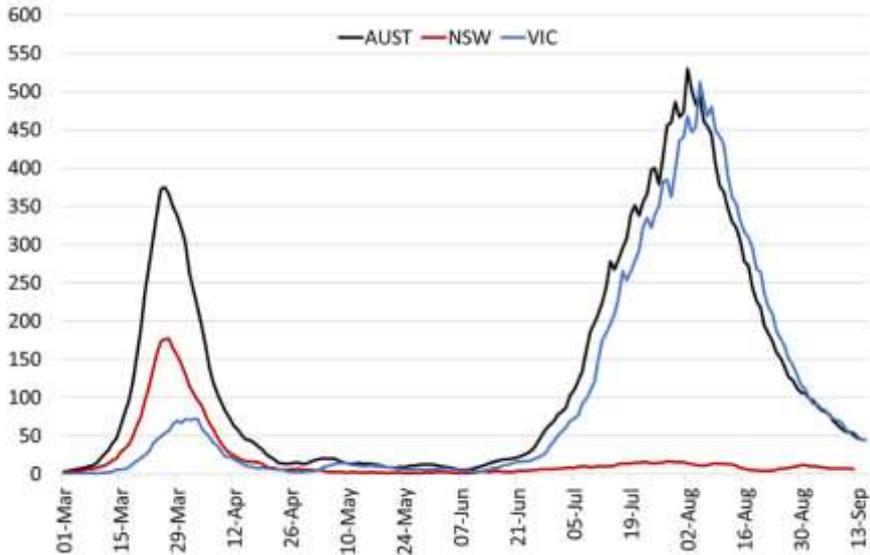
2. What is the impact of COVID-19 on your workplace or business so far?

The COVID-19 pandemic commenced in December of 2019 in Wuhan, China and quickly spread to other countries from January 2020. Australia began to experience local infections and related control measures from March. As of September 2020, Australia had experienced two 'waves' of COVID-19 infections. The first wave (March to May) saw infections and activity restrictions in all states. In the second wave (July to September), almost all COVID-19 infections were in Melbourne, Victoria (chart 1).

Australia's governments have responded to COVID-19 with a wide range of public health measures, activity restrictions and financial support (see Chapter 5 below). Direct income support for businesses and individuals is a crucial part of the economic response. The biggest economic impact of COVID-19 has been felt through businesses losing revenue or closing, and through individuals losing their jobs or work hours. The ABS estimates that by late May, 2.3 million people – 20% of Australia's workforce – had been affected by job loss or reduced working hours and income. Some recovery in business activity and employment has been evident since June in all states and territories except Victoria. At the peak of the first wave in April and May of 2020:

- JobSeeker (income support for unemployed people) was being paid to over 1.6 million people, up from around 800,000 receiving benefits prior to March; and
- JobKeeper (income support for employed workers) was being paid to 920,000 business entities in order to support 3.5 million individual workers.

Chart 2: New COVID-19 cases per day, 1 Mar to 15 Sep (7-day average), Australia, NSW and VIC



Source: www.covid19data.com.au

Australian businesses reported a range of impacts upon their operations as a result of the presence of COVID-19 and the associated activity restrictions between March and August 2020. These reports are summarised in Table 2.1 and Charts 2.1 and 2.2.

The majority of businesses reported **negative impacts** as a result of COVID-19 in each month, with some improvement evident over these months in states other than Victoria. The move to tough 'stage 4' restrictions in Melbourne and 'stage 3' restrictions in regional Victoria in early August had large implications for businesses in these locations (including enforced closures) but also affected businesses across the country due to disruptions to supply chains. Nationally, businesses were also impacted in August by ongoing state border movement restrictions, lower international demand and uncertainty about the likely timing of a return to improved conditions.

In August, business experiences reported to Ai Group from across Australia included:

- 50% of businesses said they experienced **reduced customer demand** in August, down from a peak of 66% reporting reductions in April. In Queensland, 57% of businesses reported lower demand, as did 53% in Victoria and 52% in NSW. For businesses reporting reduced demand in August, this reduction may have come on top of reductions already felt in the earlier months of 2020.
- Nationally, 19% of businesses said the **second wave of restrictions in Victoria** that came into effect on 2 August 2020 had directly impacted them. 32% of Victorian businesses, 12% in New South Wales and 7% in Queensland said these restrictions were directly inhibiting their trade in August. For businesses that operate nationally across state borders, there was a divergence between states, with a lift towards recovery in some states but stalling operations in Victoria. The long timetable for the 'stage 3 and 4' restrictions in Victoria was also of concern to businesses, with many expecting this to affect demand for some time to come.
- **State border restrictions** inhibited business for 12% of respondents nationally. In Victoria 8% of businesses reporting to Ai Group said that border closures were constraining their ability to operate, as did 20% in New South Wales and 7% in Queensland. Cross-border restrictions have meant that many businesses are unable to visit clients (7% nationally, 7% in Victoria, 8% in New South Wales and 4% in Queensland) which has delayed maintenance projects and resulted in lost sales that rely on face to face interaction or accessing client sites. Within businesses, employees are not able to move across sites, which creates problems and delays maintenance that would, in normal times, be easily resolved.
- **Disruption to supply chains** occurred early in this pandemic, with 15% of businesses reporting disruptions in March, including complications with various inputs, imports and freight. The severity of disruption reduced in June and July but crept up again in August. Across the country, 11% of businesses said supply chains were being disrupted again in August, including in Queensland (14% of businesses reporting to Ai Group), New South Wales (12%) and Victoria (8%). State border checkpoints continue to delay inter-state freight and transit across Australia's state borders. Difficulties obtaining inputs and an inability to source some imported

supplies has pushed more businesses to diversify their supply chains and to seek local sources of inputs. Reliability of supply remained a persistent issue in August, due to reductions in local and international freight.

- **Increased workloads due to HR policy development** as well as COVID-19 safe plans, work permits, and employee management had a big impact on 6% of businesses nationally in August. In Victoria, 10% of businesses reported an increase in this type of workload in the month, compared with 2% in New South Wales and none in Queensland.
- The increase in activity restrictions and the longevity of the restrictions was clearly taking a toll on workers in Victoria in August. Businesses reported concerns about **increased anxiety levels** for their employees and their mental health generally, with 6% of Victorian businesses saying workplace anxiety had increased as a problem in August compared to 2% in New South Wales and none in Queensland).
- **Increased workloads due to new OH&S and healthcare procedures** were still being reported by 6% of businesses in August, down from a high of 25% in the first stages of the pandemic in March. In Victoria, 10% of businesses reported concerns about the increase in this type of workload in August, compared with 2% in New South Wales and no businesses in Queensland. This reflects higher infection rates, level of risk and absence from workplaces in Victoria compared with other states.

New and additional cleaning and COVID-19 safe procedures have become embedded in the routine for many businesses across the country. Some have employed additional cleaning staff or increased the hours of existing support staff.

Many businesses continue to report ongoing extra costs for hygiene consumables (i.e. disposable personal protective equipment and cleaning equipment), but few businesses reported difficulties in purchasing enough PPE or cleaning supplies for their employees and worksites in August.

- **Reduced productivity** has been reported by businesses in every month since March, due to the extra time required to clean machines and workspaces between shifts. This peaked at 9% of businesses reporting to Ai Group in May before reducing in June and July and increasing again in August. 4% of businesses nationally said reduced productivity is a concern in August, including 4% in Victoria, 3% in New South Wales and 4% in Queensland.

Businesses have reported mixed effects on productivity as a result of employees working from home since March, with some noting increases in the time required to supervise, manage and support home-based workers (including, for example, a bigger focus on employee mental health and on work timetables and schedules).

- Businesses reporting that they are **not operating** at all peaked at 6% in March. The small number of businesses reporting closure after March reflects businesses closing and no longer reporting to Ai Group or requesting assistance. A handful of businesses are known to have re-opened after local restrictions were relaxed.

A small number of businesses reported **positive or neutral impacts** in the first two months of the pandemic, but those positive impacts have faded over time, and the neutral impact has reduced. (Table 2.1 and Chart 2.1 and Chart 2.2):

- The number of businesses saying there was **no direct impact** from COVID-19 in the month fell to 15% in August, down from 22% in June and 20% in July (20%). The easing of restrictions in most locations in June and July provided some relief for businesses. The Victorian restrictions in August and renewed difficulties with interstate movement impacted more businesses again in August. 15% of businesses in New South Wales and Victoria reported no direct impact on their workplace in August, as did 11% of businesses in Queensland.
- Several businesses reported a **mixed impact** on their business, with sales falling in some locations but increasing in others. For some businesses, online sales have increased, which partially compensates for the decline in sales in person or through other channels.
- Businesses working on **projects with long timelines** experienced limited impacts throughout this period, however for these businesses the lack of future demand has become a key concern. This includes businesses engaged in construction, engineering and supply to large-scale projects that are already under way.
- 13% of businesses nationally reported **business had improved** in August, down from 18% in July. In New South Wales 15% reported an improvement in August, as did 11% in Victoria and Queensland. The easing of activity restrictions was the main reason given for this improvement in some locations. Optimism was muted by the restrictions in Victoria. Some businesses which had previously experienced a decline noted that the recovery was only partial and was not yet strong enough to make up for reduced business activity in previous months.
- A temporary **initial increase in customer demand** was reported by 11% businesses in March, in the early stages of the pandemic when purchases were brought forward and problematic stockpiling was widespread. The effects of consumer stockpiling (e.g. for food, groceries and medicines) seems to have ended by July and were not reported at all in August. Some businesses who built up inventory as a buffer for potential future shortages have started to run those levels down. Supplier deliveries have fluctuated but generally reduced, as customer demand falls back into more 'normal' shopping patterns.

What did people say about the impact on their business from the stage 3 and 4 restrictions in Victoria in August?

The COVID-19 stage 3 and 4 restrictions in Victoria commenced from late July and affected businesses inside the state and elsewhere. Business people from across a range of industries that have some or all of their operations located in Victoria told us:

“The impact has been considerable in terms of staff morale as they adjust to many new standards regarding conduct and interaction with each other. Our company has conducted various training courses to assist our staff in understanding the importance of following the new restrictions - this is for their own benefit as well as that of the company’s ability to comply to the restrictions. The impact on employee mental health should not be underestimated. We are having to get involved in assisting staff in this area - something we have not needed to do in our entire history.”

“Regulation has a large impact on businesses both as a direct cost and an opportunity cost. Implementing new regulations - and there have been many of them recently - takes time. The same managers who are spending their time implementing COVID-19 practices are also faced with the challenge of returning their businesses to profit – we can’t do everything. There have been many new regulations recently such as Modern Slavery, Vic Industrial Manslaughter and Wage Theft, all of which mean well and improve our community, but please stop coming up with new and interesting ways to do that for the next three years. Leave us to recover - please.”

“The restrictions in Victoria have resulted in approximately one-third of our Victorian customers closing. The balance of customers are doing minimal service work - very little repairs and maintenance.”

“These restrictions [in Victoria] appear to have influenced business confidence in New South Wales as well, resulting in slower sales, delayed decisions and a general slowdown in activity. We anticipate a larger decline in our workload for August and September at a minimum.”

“We are unable to visit clients and we risk losing interstate business because of stage 4 lock down. In addition, our international supply chains are at risk.”

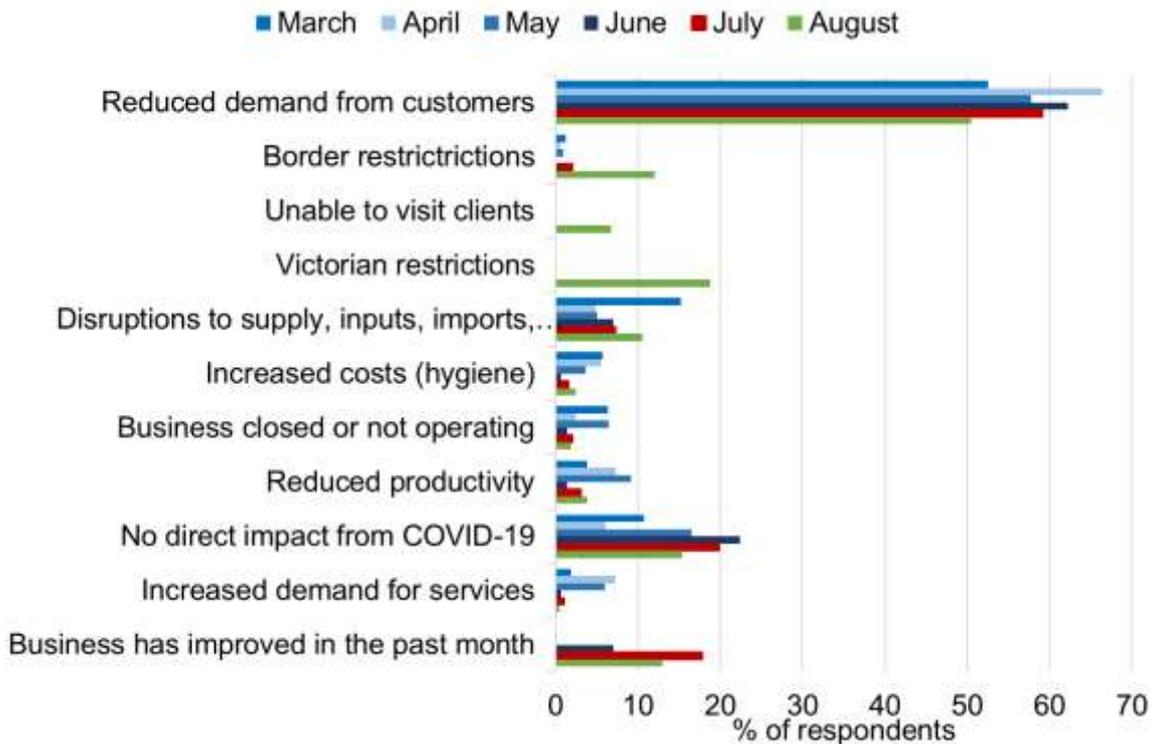
“Productivity levels are right down due to restrictions, but we are very thankful to still be operating. Management time has been completely consumed with COVID-19 - taking anywhere between 60 to 70% of our time.”

“Melbourne sales office is closed - staff working at home. Customers’ offices closed. Sub-contractors closed. Freight delays. Lack of response from professional services. Impact is diabolical. [We are] offering discounted stock to generate sales/cashflow.”

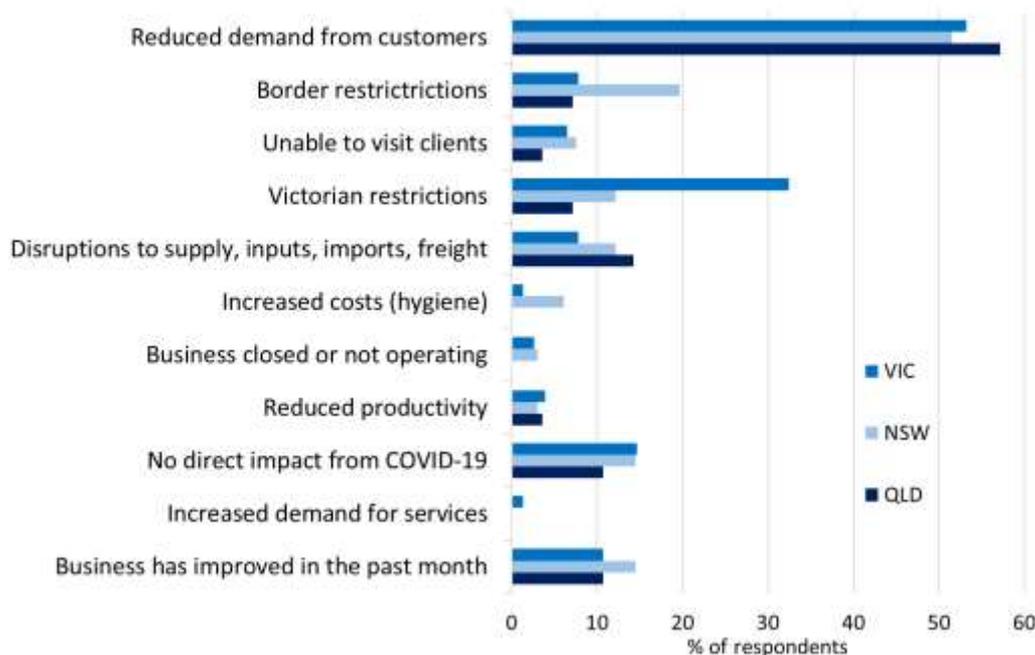
Table 2.1: What is the impact of COVID-19 on your workplace or business so far?

	March	April	May	June	July	August
% of businesses (multiple per business possible)	%	%	%	%	%	%
Negative impacts						
Reduced demand from customers	53	66	58	62	59	50
Border restrictions	1	1	1	0	2	12
Unable to visit clients	0	0	0	0	0	7
Victorian restrictions	0	0	0	0	0	19
Disruptions to supply, inputs, imports, freight	15	5	5	7	7	11
Increased work - OH&S procedures	25	13	9	6	5	6
Increased work - OH&S/HR policy	18	2	1	0	2	5
Increased anxiety levels within workforce	20	2	3	1	2	3
Increased costs (PPE, cleaning, hygiene)	6	5	4	1	2	2
Business closed or not operating	6	2	6	1	2	2
Reduced productivity	4	7	9	1	3	4
Neutral / positive impacts	%	%	%	%	%	%
No direct impact from COVID-19	5	6	17	22	20	15
Increased demand for services	11	7	6	1	1	0
Business has improved in the past month	2	0	0	7	18	13

**Chart 2.1: What is the impact of COVID-19 on your workplace or business so far?
Responses by month, March to August 2020**



**Chart 2.2: What is the impact of COVID-19 on your workplace or business so far?
Responses by state, August 2020**



3. What has been your response?

Businesses have responded to the COVID-19 global pandemic with a range of strategies. These responses are summarised in Table 3.1 and Charts 3.1 and 3.2.

As of August, Australian businesses told Ai Group:

- **Adjusting business plans** became a primary response for 23% of businesses nationally in August. In Victoria, 27% of businesses adjusted their planning in August, as did 9% in New South Wales and 38% in Queensland. The longevity of the restrictions and the depth of the downturn has meant that short-term changes have made way for longer-term strategy modifications, as businesses plan for a longer and deeper downturn. Included in this planning are changes to staff numbers and workhours, as changes to the JobKeeper wage subsidy come into effect.
- **JobKeeper** supported employee incomes for 27% of businesses reporting to Ai Group in July and August. Across the states, Jobkeeper support was reported by 33% of businesses in Victoria, 28% in New South Wales and 25% in Queensland. Respondents said they were concerned they would no longer qualify for JobKeeper due to changes in eligibility criteria and in their business situation.

A number of businesses said the JobKeeper wage subsidy (in effect from May) helped them to maintain employment hours which would otherwise have been cut. Some respondents called for the JobKeeper wage subsidy to be extended past the new end date for specific industries and locations, in order to maintain support for employees within their own business and to maintain support for their customers. Businesses are concerned they will face the daunting prospect of a reduction in demand and a reduction in support occurring at the same time in early 2021.

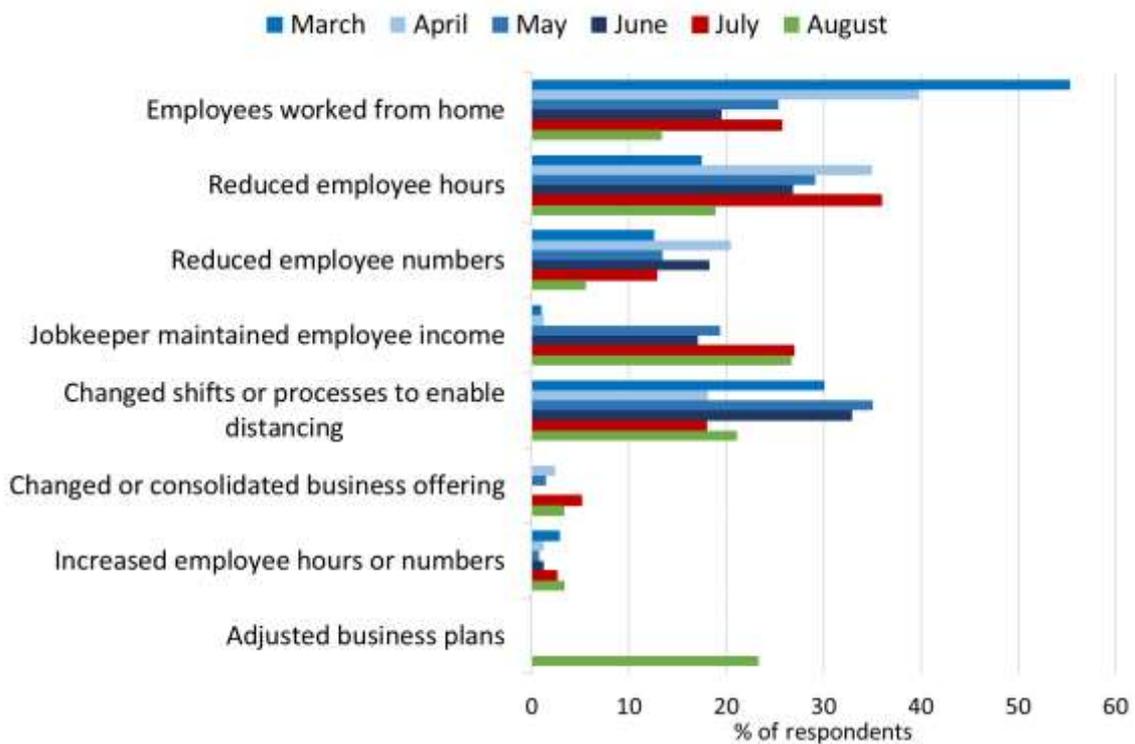
- One of the most common responses to the pandemic in August was to make further **reductions to paid work hours**. As a strategy, this peaked at 35% of businesses in April and then reduced from May, as the JobKeeper subsidy supported employment costs. Even with Jobkeeper in place, reductions in work hours was reported by 36% of business respondents in July and 19% in August. In Victoria 17% of businesses reduced work hours in August, as did 25% in New South Wales and 19% in Queensland. Further reductions to hours in August were reported by businesses who had already reduced staff numbers and hours in previous months.
- **Working from home** for some or all staff was implemented as an initial response by 55% of businesses reporting to Ai Group in March. This reflected the strong focus on health and safety in the first phase of the pandemic. Moving staff to home-based work has slowly reduced as a new strategy, with only 13% of businesses nationally implementing home-based work in August. In Victoria, 23% of businesses reported that they were still moving their staff to home-based work in August, compared to 16% in New South Wales and none in Queensland.

- A small proportion of businesses said they are actively focussed on **reducing costs other than labour**, including 6% of businesses in April, 4% in June and 6% in August.
- As activity restrictions were lifted in May and June in most locations around Australia, businesses focused on **making changes to business processes and changing the way their shifts were organised**. This became a focus for 21% of businesses nationally in August, up from 18% in July but down from the numbers seen in May and June. 17% of businesses in Victoria changed shifts and processes in August, compared to 19% in each of New South Wales and Queensland.
- In line with the changes to business plans, more businesses said they were moving into **online sales and delivery** in August (7%) than in any previous month, in response to the COVID-19 conditions.
- A handful of businesses **changed or consolidated their business offering** or increased their employee numbers.
- Responses seen earlier in the pandemic such as increased communication, physical changes to sites and variations to payment terms were rarely mentioned by businesses reporting to Ai Group in August.

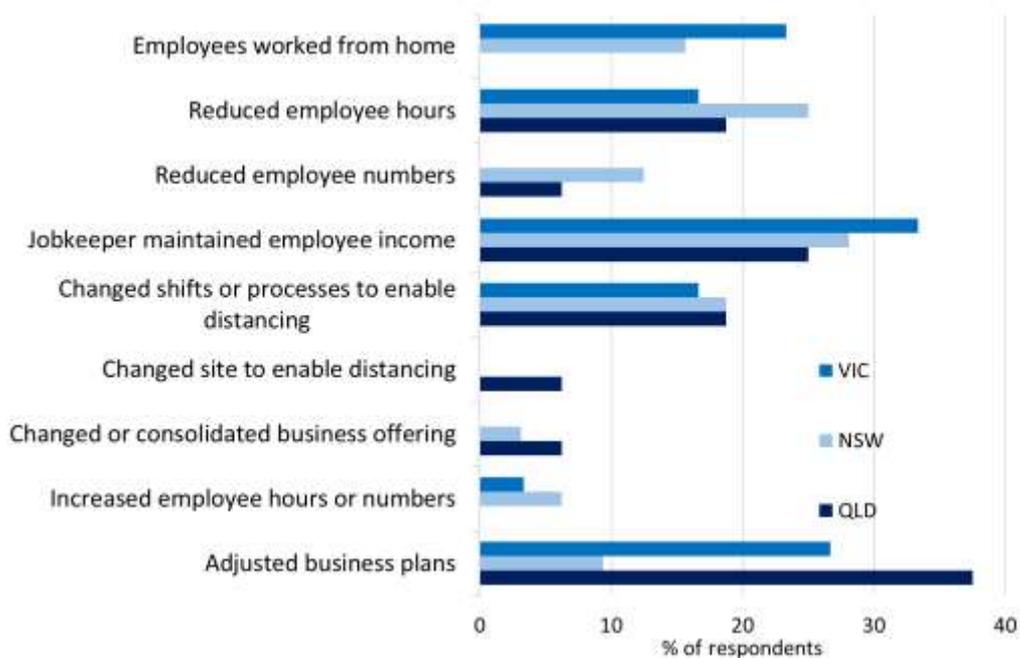
Table 3.1: What has been your response?

	March	April	May	June	July	August
% of businesses (multiple answers possible for each business)	%	%	%	%	%	%
Employees worked from home	55	40	25	20	26	13
Reduced employee hours	17	35	29	27	36	19
Reduced employee numbers	13	20	13	18	13	6
Jobkeeper maintained employee income	1	1	19	17	27	27
Changed shifts or processes to enable distancing	30	18	35	33	18	21
Changed site to enable distancing	3	0	13	2	1	1
Changed or consolidated business offering	0	2	1	0	5	3
Increased employee hours or numbers	3	1	1	1	3	3
Increased communication	17	8	6	1	3	1
Adjusted business plans	0	0	0	0	0	23

**Chart 3.1: What has been your response?
Responses by month, March to August 2020**



**Chart 3.2: What has been your response?
Responses by state, August 2020**



4. What would help you manage your business response to COVID-19?

The responses and assistance that businesses are seeking from Government (and others) as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have shifted considerably since March. The types of assistance required are summarised in Table 4.1 and Charts 4.1 and 4.2. Businesses often report on their own plans for recovery and the assistance they would like from Government (and others), in combination.

The types of assistance that businesses were seeking in August included:

- **Direct financial assistance** from State and Federal Governments has been the most pressing requirement since April. This includes stimulus payments and grants, wage subsidies and relief from payroll tax. In August, businesses that have been primarily affected by the Victorian restrictions and/or state border closures were the most in need of financial assistance. 31% of businesses nationally wanted new or additional financial assistance in August, including 25% of businesses in Victoria, 42% in New South Wales and 20% in Queensland.
- **Easing of activity restrictions** and a return to more 'normal' trading conditions was nominated as the best way forward for 36% of businesses nationally in August, the highest proportion since April. Unsurprisingly, 47% of Victorian businesses said they need restrictions to ease in August, compared with 31% of businesses in New South Wales and 30% in Queensland.
- In addition, **easing border restrictions** was mentioned as necessary to improving conditions for 17% of businesses nationally in August. This would assist recovery for 22% of businesses in Victoria, 15% in New South Wales and 10% in Queensland. This would resolve many immediate problems for businesses including faster freight, enabling employees to access their employment sites, enabling businesses to visit their customers for maintenance projects, and enabling sales teams to visit their customers' sites.
- 10% of businesses said that **increased certainty** was vital to improve conditions in August. This reflects the frequent changes to activity restrictions over many months and a lack of longer-term vision. This lack of certainty about the outlook is reducing the ability to plan and develop strategies across all types of businesses. The toll of this uncertainty is immense, particularly for businesses that have experienced repeated closures and reductions since early 2020.
- In order to stimulate local demand, 10% of businesses nationally called for greater **promotion of locally made goods**. Local promotions were suggested as a useful assistance strategy by 8% of businesses in Victoria and New South Wales, but none in Queensland. Businesses also suggested stronger **local procurement**

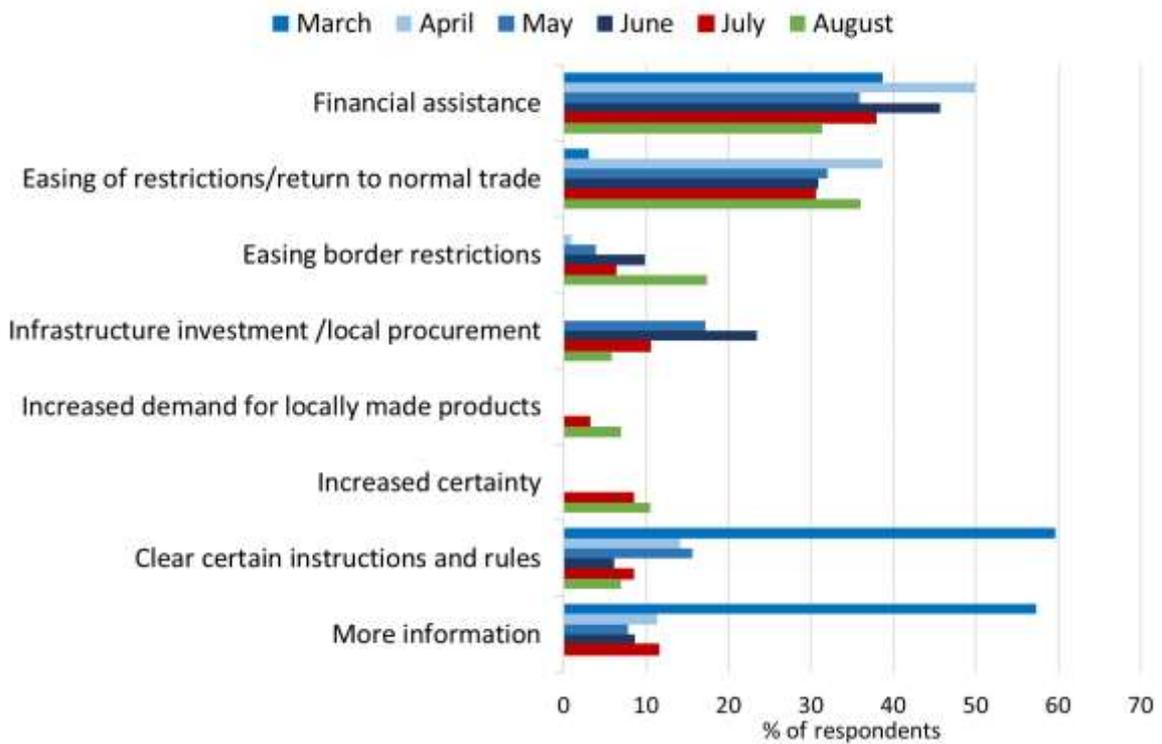
provisions by government; investment to diversify supply chains; and increased public promotion of Australian goods (e.g. an advertising campaign).

- **Infrastructure investment** was nominated as a means to support local economic recovery by 23% of businesses reporting to Ai Group in June and 6% in August.
- In the early stages, there was an urgent need for **clear rules and instructions** to help business respond to activity restrictions. Around 60% of businesses were asking for more information and simple, straightforward instructions in March. As of August, there is still some uncertainty regarding restrictions across states and dates. 7% of businesses were again asking for clearer rules in August, however no businesses were looking for more information generally in August.
- In the earlier stages of the pandemic, businesses needed assistance with imports and exports, domestic freight, access to PPE and employee management. By June, no businesses were still requesting these more practical types of assistance.

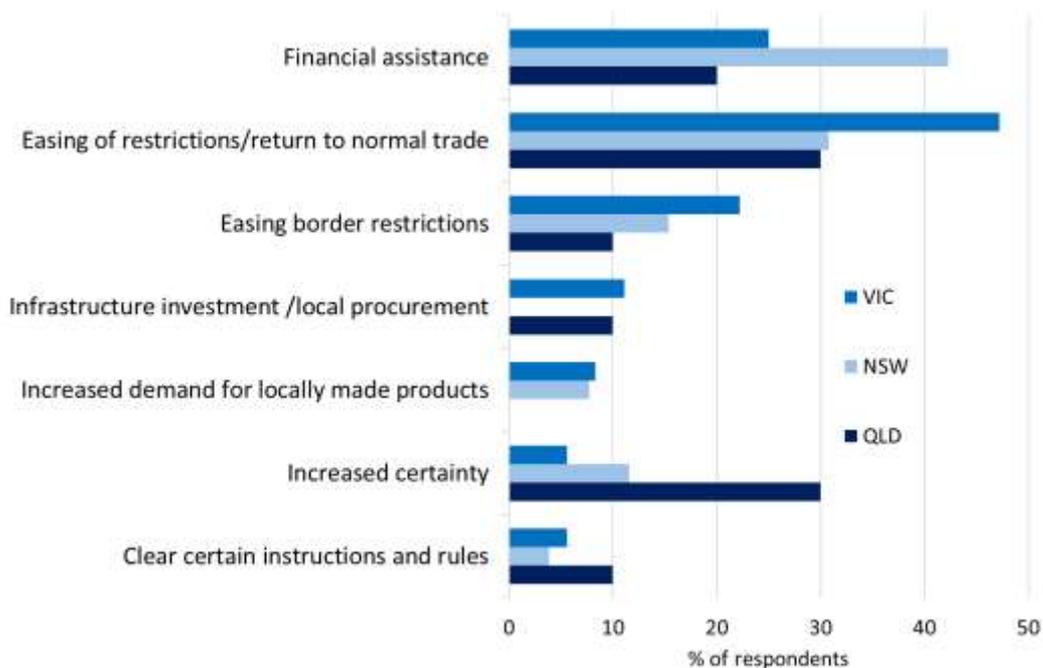
Table 4.1: What would help manage your business response to COVID-19?

	March	April	May	June	July	August
% of businesses (multiple answers possible for each business)	%	%	%	%	%	%
Financial assistance	39	50	36	46	38	31
Easing of restrictions/return to normal trade	3	39	32	31	31	36
Easing border restrictions	0	1	4	10	6	17
Infrastructure investment /local procurement	0	0	17	23	11	6
Increased demand for locally made products	0	0	0	0	3	7
Increased certainty	0	0	0	0	8	10
Clear certain instructions and rules	60	14	16	6	8	7
More information	57	11	8	9	12	0
Assistance with employee management	11	1	1	0	0	2
Improved access to PPE & hygiene products	9	1	2	0	0	1
Assistance with domestic logistics and freight	1	2	2	0	0	0
Assistance with imports, exports, trade	0	1	2	0	0	0

**Chart 4.1: What would help you manage your business response to COVID-19?
Responses by month, March to August 2020**



**Chart 4.2: What would help you manage your business response to COVID-19?
Responses by state, August 2020**



5. Business responses, by month, by industry and by state

In total, Ai Group received 1,292 detailed reports from businesses about their experience of the COVID-19 pandemic between March and August. A small number of businesses offered feedback in each of these months. Most businesses reported their experiences in detail more than once. The composition of these business responses is shown in Table 5.1 by month, industry and state.

These business reports are not intended to provide a representative sample of all Australian businesses or all of the Australian economy. Instead, they illustrate the concerns, issues and factors that businesses reported to Ai Group about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their business in each of these months.

The data for each month includes all reports received from the first day of the month until the last, including reports added retrospectively. The reporting period for August includes the return to stage 3 restrictions in regional Victoria and the implementation of stage 4 restrictions in the greater Melbourne area, from Sunday 2 August.

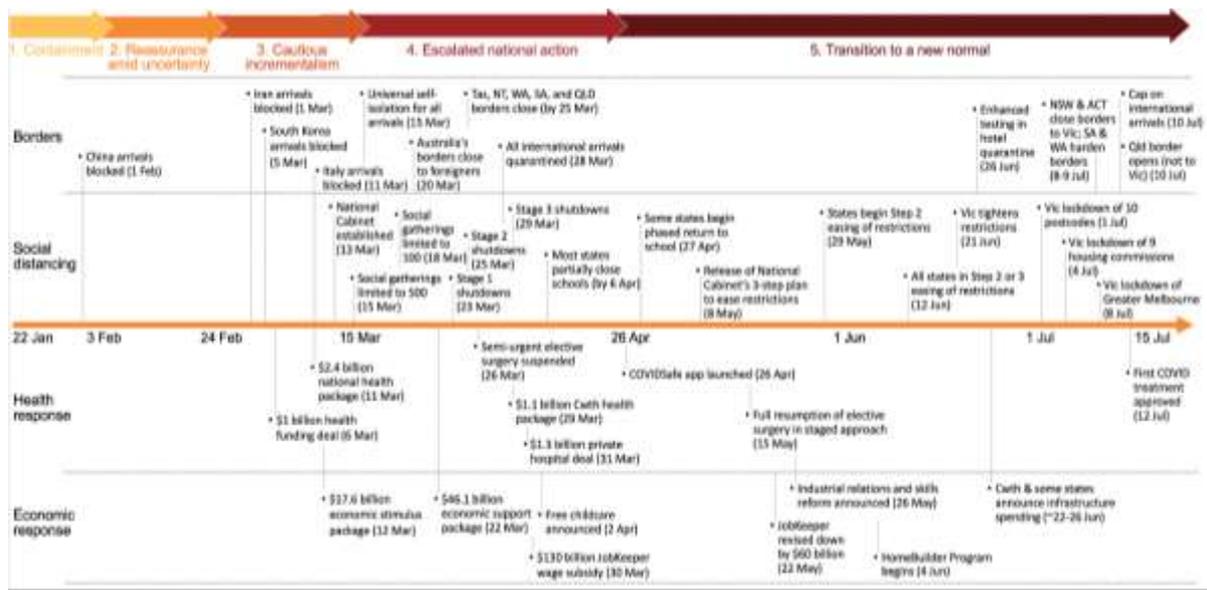
Table 5.1: Business responses to Ai Group about COVID-19

Industry	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Total
Business services	50	31	43	23	38	40	225
Consumer services	26	7	17	11	19	16	96
Manufacturing*	57	24	36	28	25	34	204
Manufacturing - machinery & equipment	24	29	40	30	37	37	197
Manufacturing - metal products	28	29	54	49	33	38	231
Construction & mining services	10	87	72	49	59	62	339
TOTAL	195	207	262	190	211	227	1,292
NSW	63	57	92	58	67	71	408
VIC	78	67	83	57	75	83	443
QLD	37	37	36	34	28	31	203
Other states	17	46	51	41	41	42	238
TOTAL	195	207	262	190	211	227	1,292

*manufacturing including food, beverages, wood, paper, packaging, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, textiles, clothing.

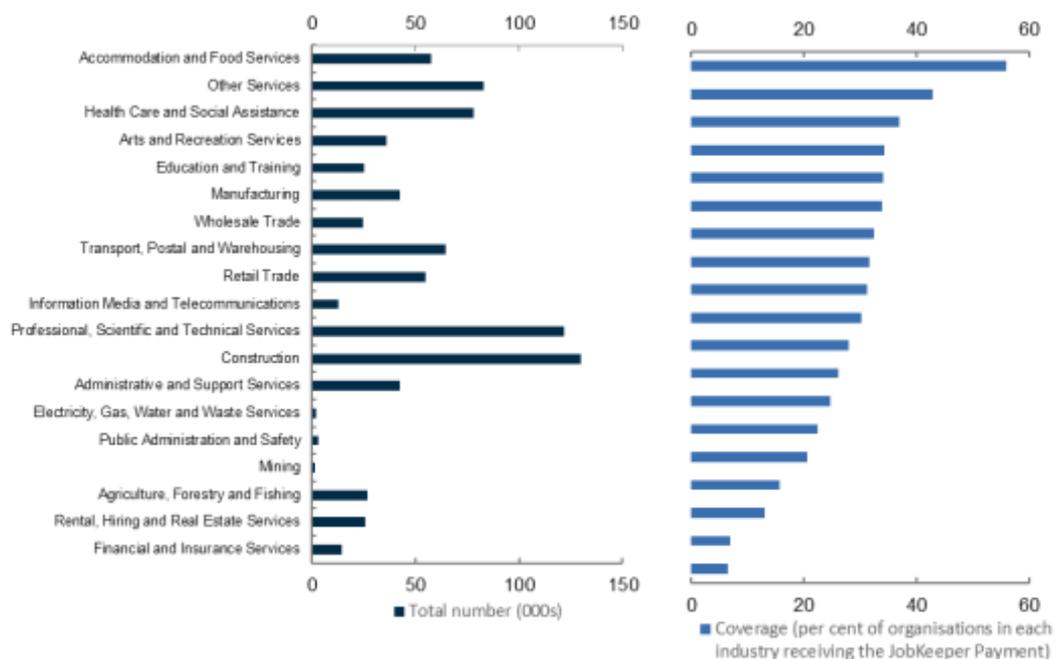
6. Timeline of Australia's experience of COVID-19, January to September 2020

Chart 6.1: Government responses to COVID-19, Jan to July



Source: Grattan Institute

Chart 6.2: Business applications for JobKeeper, April 2020



Source: Australian Treasury, *JobKeeper Payment: Three Month Review*, June 2020.

January 2020

25 Jan: First recorded novel cases of coronavirus in Australia (returned travellers from Wuhan, China). Australian Government issues "do not travel" warnings to China.

February 2020

5 Feb: Australian Government announces a 14-day ban for non-citizens arriving from China. Ban extended indefinitely on 20 February.

12 Feb: WHO officially names the novel coronavirus as 'COVID-19'.

March 2020

1 March: first Australian COVID-19 fatality (from the Diamond Princess cruise ship).

3 March: RBA cuts Australia's cash rate to a record low of 0.50%.

6 March: Australian Government commits \$500 million to health costs for COVID-19.

11 March: WHO declares COVID-19 a global pandemic. Australian Government announces a national healthcare support package (\$2.4 billion).

12 March: Australian Government announces financial assistance (\$17.6 billion) including: instant asset write-offs; reduced PAYG withholding tax to the ATO; wage subsidies for apprentices and trainees; increased payments for welfare recipients.

13 March: Australian Government forms a "National Cabinet" of Federal, State and Territory leaders to facilitate a united approach to the COVID-19 crisis.

15 March: Australian Government bans gatherings of more than 500 people.

16 March: Australian Government orders all people arriving from overseas to self-isolate for 14 days. Victorian Government declares 'state of emergency'.

17 March: Australian Government suspends all commercial international travel.

18 March: Australian Government bans indoor gatherings of more than 100 people.

19 March: Ruby Princess cruise ship docks in Sydney and passengers disembark.

19 March: RBA cuts cash rate to record low of 0.25%.

20 March: Australian Government imposes 'social distancing' including 1.5 metres between people in public areas. Australian states begin to close state borders.

21 March: Australian Government bans non-citizens and non-residents from entering Australia. Incoming citizens and permanent residents must self-quarantine for 14 days.

22 March: 'Stage 2' restrictions are progressively implemented across all states. Second round of business financial assistance (\$66 billion) includes grants and payments for welfare recipients; guaranteed loans for businesses; temporary leniency for insolvency and bankruptcy; temporary relief for directors trading whilst insolvent.

23-26 March: Bars, restaurants, clubs, cinemas, places of worship, casinos and gyms are closed. Schools start to close across all states. Open house inspections banned. Attendance at weddings and funerals restricted. Elective surgery suspended.

27 March: All international arrivals must undertake mandatory quarantine in hotels.

29 March: Six-month moratorium on rental evictions (by State Governments). All Australians urged to stay at home. No more than two people may be together in public.

30 March: Australian Government announces third round of financial assistance (\$130 billion) including JobKeeper and JobSeeker income support programs.

31 March: Australian Government announces \$1.3 billion support for private hospitals.

April 2020

2 April: Australian Government announces free childcare during the COVID-19 crisis.

7 April: Australian Government announces mandatory code for commercial tenancies.

Mid to late April: Activity restrictions begin to ease at various speeds around Australia.

12 April: 'Higher Education Relief Package' to support displaced workers' retraining and to support universities and other higher education providers to continue teaching.

17 April: 'Domestic Aviation Network Guarantee' worth \$165 million to assist airlines.

24 April: National 'COVID-19 Safe Workplace Principles' introduced by the National Cabinet. 10 'Workplace Principles' to be applied to all workplaces across Australia.

26 April: Activity restrictions begin to relax across all states and territories.

May 2020

8 May: Initial payroll deadline for the JobKeeper program.

June 2020

Early June: progressive easing of activity restrictions at various stages around Australian states and territories. Physical return to school for students in Victoria.

July 2020

9 July. Stage 3 activity restrictions imposed again on Greater Melbourne and Mitchell Shire (VIC) for at least 6 weeks. Border between NSW and Victoria is closed.

23 July: Treasurer presents an update on the Federal Government Budget position, economic outlook and review of JobKeeper arrangements.

August 2020

2 August. Stage 4 activity restrictions imposed on Greater Melbourne including night curfew and resident lockdown. Stage 3 activity restrictions for regional Victoria. State borders begin to close again across Australia. Due to step down on 28 September.



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