



Deputy Secretary
Nathan Smyth

Dear Chief Executive Officer

COVID-19 – Victoria - Return to Mutual Obligation Requirements

Today, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business and Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, Minister for Families and Social Services, announced that from 23 November 2020, mutual obligation requirements will be re-introduced in Victoria. This will align requirements for Victorian job seeker's with national arrangements.

This means that from 23 November 2020, job seekers in Victoria will be required to participate in appointments with an employment services provider, agree to their Job Plan, undertake eight job searches a month, attend agreed activities (where it is safe to do so), and accept any offer of suitable work. Work for the Dole will resume where activities are available, it is safe to participate and all health and safety requirements are met.

Please be reminded that job seekers now have the option to opt in for face-to-face servicing. More information on the flexible ways that services can be delivered across all programs is available on the provider portal. In addition, Job Plans **must** be tailored and appropriate to a job seeker's personal circumstances and local labour market conditions. Similarly, these factors should be considered when assessing whether there is a valid reason for a mutual obligation failure.

I would like to reiterate my request that your organisation advise job seekers personally affected by COVID-19 on the possibility of seeking an exemption from their mutual obligation requirements from Services Australia, and to proactively support them in doing so. We also ask that you actively refer job seekers who would benefit from further support, including mental health services, to other programs and services provided by government and community services. The Employment Fund can be utilised for this purpose – including for Stream A job seekers.

Job seekers who do not meet their obligations may be subject to payment suspensions or penalties. However, as previously advised, beginning on Monday, 7 December 2020, payment suspensions will no longer be immediate when a job seeker fails to meet a mutual obligation requirement. Instead, job seekers will have two business days to contact their employment services provider to discuss and, if required, address the failure before their payment is suspended.

This refinement to the operation of payment suspensions builds on the improvements we introduced in September 2020, where job seekers who have a valid reason for not meeting a mutual obligation requirement no longer need to meet a re-engagement requirement (usually attending another appointment) in order to have the hold on their payment lifted.

As mentioned previously, the Government is increasing opportunities for job seekers to train and upskill by providing additional flexibility for job seekers to count education and training towards their mutual obligation requirements. This will encourage job seekers to undertake eligible courses that are under 12 months in duration and provide skills that are in demand. These include courses subsidised by each state/territory's vocational education and training system, courses funded through the Government's JobTrainer program, as well as short online courses previously available as part of the Higher Education Relief Package where job seekers are still participating in these courses.


To ensure job seekers in Victoria understand their mutual obligations requirements prior to 23 November 2020, the department will distribute a suite of communication material via website updates, SMS, email and inbox communications. For more information about this phase of the gradual return of mutual obligations, please visit <https://www.dese.gov.au/covid-19/job-seekers>

The Government continues to monitor and respond to the COVID-19 situation and any further mutual obligation requirement changes will be informed by advice from health authorities and the status of the Australian labour market.

My next CEO livestream on Friday 20 November 2020 will include advice about these changes. You can also contact your Account or Contract Manager if you have any questions.

I would like to again acknowledge and thank you for the work you have done to date to support job seekers during the significant impact of COVID-19 particularly in Victoria.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nathan Smyth', with a large, stylized loop at the beginning and a horizontal line extending to the right.

Nathan Smyth
13 November 2020