

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

FOR RESIDENTS ACROSS THE RIVERINA AND CENTRAL WEST

May 2020

COVID-19 relief: [Pages 4-7, 12](#) • BUSHFIRE relief: [Pages 8, 9](#) • DROUGHT relief: [Pages 10, 11](#)



Michael McCormack MP

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA
MINISTER FOR INFRASTRUCTURE, TRANSPORT AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT
LEADER OF THE NATIONALS
FEDERAL MEMBER FOR RIVERINA

Three-step framework for COVIDSafe Australia: [Pages 6, 7](#)



We are all in this fight together

Australia is winning the battle against the most serious health and economic crisis in living memory. Everyone is doing their bit to save lives and protect livelihoods, but there is still a long road ahead.

Dear fellow regional Australians,

Not long ago, regional Australia was reeling from the devastation of widespread bushfires.

It was the most shocking season in memory. It came fast and heavy on top of the worst impacts of a prolonged drought followed by flooding in some areas.

Now we find ourselves in the fight of our lives – confronting the very real threat of coronavirus (COVID-19).

We are no stranger to challenges. We have faced them head-on. Repeatedly.

But this is a fight like no other

Coronavirus knows no bounds. It does not discriminate. It can affect any age, but our elderly are more at risk of the devastatingly genuine potential of death.

In order to mitigate the risk to ourselves and each other, strict but necessary measures have been enforced.

It is critical we take responsibility for our actions. It could literally be the difference between life and death for someone – maybe even a loved one.

And you have played your crucial part to save lives and protect livelihoods.

The suppression of COVID-19 has allowed us to strengthen our health system and put other protections in place, including ramped-up testing protocols, more intensive care beds, more ventilators and more personal protective equipment.

The COVIDSafe app will allow faster contact tracing and the ability to minimise the risk of any future outbreaks.

There will be outbreaks and significant challenges.

Although restrictions are easing, we must not lose sight of the bigger picture.

That's why I implore you to please listen to the expert medical advice.

Continue to practise social distancing and good personal hygiene. Download the COVIDSafe app.

These steps are vital if we are to continue to stop the spread of COVID-19 and save lives.

Yes, it means life will look a bit different for a while.

Yes, it will be an inconvenience.

But it is a small price to pay to save members of our community and minimise impacts on our economy.

COVID-19 has affected the globe. No nation is immune and there will be long-lasting impacts.

People will lose their jobs, some businesses may have to close their doors for good. Our economy will suffer.

Regional Australia will be severely affected.



STAY VIGILANT: Restrictions may be easing, but I urge and encourage everyone to practise social distancing along with thorough personal hygiene measures.



At a glance: key contacts

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

- **www.australia.gov.au** contains all the latest information, including links to each State and Territory Governments' websites
- If you require further information, you can also call the National Coronavirus Health Information Line on **1800 020 080**. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you require translating or interpreting services, call **131 450**
- **1800 806 218** for enquiries about the JobKeeper payment and superannuation measures

Bushfires

- **www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au** is the best place to go for comprehensive information
- For all enquiries, call **02 6228 6300** or email **contact@bushfirerecovery.gov.au**
- NSW Rural Fire Service Bushfire Information Line: **1800 679 737**

Drought

- **www.drought.gov.au** has all the information on the Federal Government's drought assistance or call **1800 900 090**
- **www.farmhub.org.au** connects farmers to helpful services and support

Mental Health Support

- Beyond Blue: **1300 22 4636** or **www.beyondblue.org.au**
- Lifeline Australia: **13 11 14**
- Kids Help Line: **1800 55 18 00**
- **www.headtohealth.gov.au** for detailed information and advice on mental health issues

But we know our world-class produce comes from regional Australia and that will not stop.

The Australian Government is doing everything it can to put in place responsible and considered measures to support our health and economy, worth hundreds of billions of dollars.

**Visit the website:
www.australia.gov.au**

This website is a great source of health and economic information. It also has links to support services for those who need it.

It is critical, now more than ever, we are united in our fight.

Your friends, family, co-workers and neighbours are depending on you.

Your country is depending on you.

Do the right thing.

Save lives.

Michael McCormack

Michael McCormack MP

Deputy Prime Minister of Australia
Minister for Infrastructure, Transport
and Regional Development
Leader of The Nationals
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Roll-out of General Practitioner-led COVID 19 respiratory clinics

The first rural General Practitioner-led COVID-19 respiratory clinic in New South Wales has officially opened at Wagga Wagga's Glenrock Country Practice.

Other GP-led respiratory clinics have since opened in Cowra, Gundagai and Young and are part of the Australian Government's \$2.4 billion health package to combat COVID-19.

Wagga Wagga is a health hub for the Riverina and the Murrumbidgee region with more than 250,000 people relying on the regional city's health services and medical professionals.

These local clinics will help to reduce future pressure on hospital emergency departments and other general practices as we ease restrictions and brace for any potential outbreaks.

Rural and regional residents deserve health care services which are just as good as those provided in our major cities and the national roll-out of these new clinics goes to addressing that.

The Government is investing \$206.7 million to establish more than 100 respiratory clinics across Australia, including in rural and regional areas. Additionally, more than 160 fever clinics, jointly funded by the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments, are also in operation across Australia.

For your nearest COVID-19 clinic, visit www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/clinics.aspx or call healthdirect on 1800 022 222.



TESTING: Dr Ayman Shenouda of Glenrock Country Practice at the recently opened COVID-19 respiratory clinic in Wagga Wagga – the first of its kind in regional NSW.

Help to continue stopping the spread

Even though we are suppressing the spread of the virus, it remains vitally important that we continue to adhere to the restrictions as recommended by the Chief Medical Officer Professor Brendan Murphy.

The New South Wales Government has expanded the criteria for testing to include anyone who

displays cold or flu-like symptoms. Please do not take the risk of potentially spreading this deadly virus to those around you who are more vulnerable – take the time to get tested and be sure to do your bit to save lives and protect livelihoods.



Regional air services vital to local communities

Regional Australians are relying on air services now more than ever, with communities needing access to medicines, medical equipment, critical supplies and essential personnel.

That's why I was determined to fund the \$198 million Regional Air Network Assistance Package, to secure a regional aviation network for locals and others in regional areas during this pandemic.

I have worked tirelessly as the Member for Riverina and Minister responsible for aviation to ensure our community and those across regional Australia get the services they need.

Thanks to our funding, REX will continue twice-weekly return flights from Sydney to Wagga and thrice-weekly return flights from Wagga to Melbourne via Albury. Parkes will be serviced by three weekly return flights to Sydney, via Bathurst.

QantasLink will be flying return from Wagga to Sydney twice a week.

We've committed more than \$1.2 billion of support to our aviation industry because we want the sector to get to the other side of this pandemic in the best position possible.

This includes:

- \$715 million package waiving fuel excise and Government changes backdated to 1 February 2020;
- \$100 million to provide direct financial support to smaller regional airlines;
- An initial \$165 million to maintain key routes for eight weeks.

We are ensuring secure and affordable access for passengers who need to travel, including our essential workers such as frontline medical personnel and defence personnel, as well as supporting the movement of essential freight such as critical medicine and personal protective equipment.



VITAL INDUSTRY: *Announcing the Federal Government's aviation package at the Wagga Air Centre recently.*

JobKeeper Payment to help workers

The \$70 billion JobKeeper Payment, one of the most important pieces of legislation in our nation's history, is keeping thousands of regional Australians in jobs through the pandemic.

The fortnightly \$1,500 payment will be paid to employers for each eligible employee who was on their books on 1 March 2020 and is retained or continues to be engaged by that employer.

Eligible employers include businesses structured through companies, partnerships, trusts and sole traders. Not-for-profit entities, including charities, will also be eligible.

Self-employed individuals are also eligible to receive the JobKeeper Payment.

Eligible businesses can apply for the payment online and are able to register their interest via www.ato.gov.au

**For general enquiries contact
13 28 61 for individuals or 13 28 66
for businesses.**



3 STEP FRAMEWORK FOR A COVIDSAFE AUSTRALIA

MAINTAIN 1.5M DISTANCING AND GOOD HYGIENE • STAY HOME IF UNWELL • FREQUENTLY CLEAN AND DISINFECT COMMUNAL AREAS • COVIDSAFE PLAN FOR WORKPLACES AND PREMISES

ALL STEPS ARE SUBJECT TO EXPERT HEALTH ADVICE • States and territories can implement changes based on their COVID-19 conditions

	GATHERINGS & WORK	EDUCATION & CHILDCARE	RETAIL & SALES	CAFES & RESTAURANTS	ENTERTAINMENT & AMUSEMENT VENUES	SPORT & RECREATION	ACCOMMODATION	WEDDINGS, FUNERALS & RELIGIOUS SERVICES	HAIR & BEAUTY SERVICES	DOMESTIC TRAVEL
STEP 1	STEP 1: The important first small steps – connect with friends and family - allowing groups of people to be together in homes and in the community. Businesses reopen, and more people return to work									
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-work gatherings of up to 10 Up to 5 visitors at home in addition to normal residents Work from home if it works for you and your employer Workplaces develop a COVIDSafe plan Avoid public transport in peak hour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child care centres, primary and secondary schools open as per state and territory plans Universities/technical colleges to increase face-to-face where possible and prioritise hands-on, skills based learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retail stores open Retail stores and shopping centre managers must develop COVIDSafe plans Auctions/open homes can have gatherings of up to 10, recording contact details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May open and seat up to 10 patrons at one time Need to maintain an average density of 4m² per person Food courts are to remain closed to seated patrons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To remain closed: Indoor movie theatres, concert venues, stadiums, galleries, museums, zoos, pubs, registered and licensed clubs, nightclubs, gaming venues, strip clubs and brothels Exception: Restaurants or cafes in these venues may seat up to 10 patrons at one time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No indoor physical activity including gyms Community centres, outdoor gyms, playgrounds and skate parks allow up to 10 people Outdoor sport (up to 10 people) consistent with the AIS Framework for Rebooting Sport Pools open with restrictions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue current arrangements for caravan parks and camping grounds (closed to tourists in some states and territories) Hostels and hotels are open for accommodation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weddings may have up to 10 guests in addition to the couple and the celebrant Funerals may have up to 20 mourners indoors and 30 outdoors Religious gatherings may have up to 10 attendees Every gathering must record contact details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hairdressers and barber shops open and record contact details Beauty therapy and massage therapy venues, saunas and tattoo parlours remain closed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow local and regional travel for recreation Refer to state and territory governments for border restrictions and biosecurity conditions
	STEP 2	STEP 2: Building on slightly larger gatherings and more businesses reopening. Higher risk activities may have tighter restrictions								
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-work gatherings of up to 20 States and territories may allow larger numbers in some circumstances Work from home if it works for you and your employer Workplaces develop a COVIDSafe plan Avoid public transport in peak hour 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child care centres, primary and secondary schools open as per state and territory plans Universities/technical colleges to increase face-to-face where possible and prioritise hands-on, skills based learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retail stores open Retail stores and shopping centre managers must develop COVIDSafe plans Auctions/open homes can have gatherings of up to 20, recording contact details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cafes and restaurants can seat up to 20 patrons at one time Need to maintain an average density of 4m² per person Food courts are to remain closed to seated patrons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indoor movie theatres, concert venues, stadiums, galleries, museums, zoos may have up to 20 patrons To remain closed: pubs, registered and licensed clubs, RSL clubs, casinos, nightclubs, strip clubs and brothels Exception: Restaurants or cafes in these venues may seat up to 20 patrons at one time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to 20 people allowed to participate in outdoor sports consistent with the AIS Framework for Rebooting Sport Up to 20 people allowed to participate in all indoor sports, including gyms Need to maintain an average density of 4m² per person Pools open with restrictions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Caravan parks and camping grounds fully open All accommodation areas open and allow gatherings of up to 20 people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weddings may have up to 20 guests in addition to the couple and the celebrant Funerals may have up to 50 mourners Religious gatherings may have up to 20 attendees Every gathering must record contact details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hairdressers and barber shops open and record contact details Beauty therapy and massage therapy venues and tattoo parlours can open with up to 20 clients in the premises and record contact details Saunas and bathhouses remain closed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow local and regional travel for recreation Consider allowing interstate recreational travel depending on the situation in each state and territory Refer to state and territory governments for biosecurity conditions
STEP 3		STEP 3: A commitment to reopening of business and the community with minimal restrictions, but underpinned by COVIDSafe ways of living								
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-work gatherings of up to 100 people Larger gatherings to be considered Return to workplace Workplaces develop a COVIDSafe plan Avoid public transport in peak hour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child care centres, primary and secondary schools open as per state and territory plans Universities/technical colleges to increase face-to-face where possible and prioritise hands-on, skills based learning Consider reopening residential colleges and international student travel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retail stores open Retail stores and shopping centre managers must develop COVIDSafe plans Auctions/open homes can have gatherings of up to 100, recording contact details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cafes, restaurants and food courts can seat up to 100 people Need to maintain an average density of 4m² per person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Venues open in Step 2 may have up to 100 patrons Consideration will be given to opening bar areas and gaming rooms Exception: Restaurants or cafes in these venues may seat up to 100 patrons at one time To remain closed: strip clubs and brothels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All venues allowed to operate with gatherings of up to 100 people Need to maintain an average density of 4m² per person Community sport expansion to be considered consistent with the AIS Framework for Rebooting Sport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All accommodation areas open and allow gatherings of up to 100 people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow gatherings of up to 100 people Every gathering must record contact details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All establishments allowed to open with up to 100 people Record contact details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow interstate travel Refer to state and territory governments for biosecurity conditions



Helping local communities rebuild after devastating bushfires

While the bushfires have been put out, the devastation remains in those local communities hit by one of the worst fire seasons in living memory.

Thanks to all the courageous efforts of every person who assisted in some way during the crisis – from the brave firefighters to the volunteers who carted water from town to town – you all did Australia proud in your efforts to save lives and homes.

A new \$650 million package of support from the Federal Government is helping towns and regions get back on their feet.

The Regional Bushfire Recovery and Development Program will help bushfire-affected communities share in \$448.5 million to support the delivery of local recovery plans with priority given to the most severely affected regions, drawing on local voices and local governments in close partnership and as part of cost-sharing arrangements with the New South Wales Government.

I urge local communities to work with the State Government to provide the National Bushfire Recovery Agency with their priority projects as soon as possible. Sadly, 33 people have lost their lives, including six brave firefighters; 2900 homes have been confirmed lost; and more than 10.4 million hectares were burnt out.

We have been focused on the immediate relief we need to get to people on the ground while also planning for the ongoing recovery effort.



ANIMAL CARE: Charles Sturt University's Joe Price with one of the many evacuated animals which the Wagga Wagga campus housed at the height of the bushfire crisis.

Recovery effort and our \$2 billion National Bushfire Recovery Fund

- Forestry Transport Assistance (\$15 million): to assist the forestry industry with the increased costs of transporting burned salvaged logs over longer distances to surviving timber mills or storage sites in bushfire-affected areas
- Community Wellbeing and Participation (\$13.5 million): backing Primary Health Networks with additional funding to provide critical, localised emotional and mental health support for bushfire-affected individuals
- Bushfire Recovery for Species and Landscapes (\$149.7 million): supporting efforts that go beyond the immediate devastation on species and natural assets through habitat regeneration, waterway and catchment restoration including erosion control, weed and pest management
- Telecommunications Emergency Resilience (\$27.1 million as well as \$10 million from the Mobile Blackspot Program): strengthening telecommunications capabilities prior to future natural disasters
- \$60 million to support severely impacted local councils
- \$76 million for mental health support through counselling and Medicare
- \$40 million paid to charities – including The Salvation Army and St Vincent de Paul – to enable them to provide direct assistance on the ground by way of food, fuel and cash

Fast Facts: National Bushfire Recovery Agency

Immediate assistance

- Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment (AGDRP) – \$1000 per eligible adult and \$400 per eligible child. The Australian Government has announced the child payment will double to \$800
- More than \$105 million paid through AGDRP and another \$15 million in children's payments so far
- Australian Government Disaster Recovery Allowance – up to 13 weeks of income support. We're also simplifying the application process
- Payments to Volunteer Firefighters – up to \$300 per day for lost income (up to \$6,000)
- Up to \$75,000 recovery grants to primary producers and farmers (initial estimate \$100 million)
- \$50,000 grants to affected businesses
- Loans of up to \$500,000 with deferred repayments and concessional rates
- Single point of contact – a new hotline and 10 new financial counsellors: **180 22 66**
- Delay tax filing requirements
- Job seekers are able to undertake voluntary work activities to contribute towards their Mutual Obligation requirements, in eligible not-for-profit organisations, which can include rural, country and emergency fire services

Repackaging small business assistance

- A new \$10,000 grant for businesses which have experienced a 40 per cent drop in revenue over a three-month period, compared to the previous year, as a result of the bushfires
- Quicker access to existing loans by cutting red tape with fewer documents and security requirements
- More boots on the ground to help small businesses access appropriate help



SIMPLE MESSAGE: *Many residents throughout bushfire-affected regions paid tribute to the brave firefighters.*

A Royal Commission will focus on:

- improving natural disaster management co-ordination across all levels of government;
- improving Australia's preparedness, resilience, and response to natural disasters, across all levels of government;
- the legal framework for the Commonwealth's involvement in responding to national emergencies and how that works with State and Territory legal frameworks.

Australian Defence Force

- Assisted efforts since the start of the season in September
- First ever compulsory call-out of reservists
- More than 6,500 personnel on the ground as well as deployed the HMAS *Choules*, *Sycamore* and *Adelaide*



Drought support there for those who need it

Even though we have seen some welcome rain in our region, the Federal Government knows our local communities are still suffering from the effects of the drought.

We are all hopeful the worst of the drought has passed, but we know the recovery will take many years.

The Australian Government has a three-part plan to tackle the most pressing issues for people affected by drought, including more than \$8 billion in assistance and concessional loans:

1. Helping those affected right now

This includes the Farm Household Allowance, Rural Financial Counselling Service and \$65.4 million for the Drought Community Support Initiative, which provides \$3,000 to farmers, farm workers and suppliers/contractors who are facing hardship due to drought. There is also \$29.9 million for mental health and wellbeing support, two-year interest free Drought Loans for farmers and tax relief, over two rounds.

2. Supporting wider communities

This includes \$300 million for the Drought Communities Programme Extension, redirecting the \$200 million Round Four of the Building Better Regions Fund to drought-affected communities and an additional \$138.9 million for Roads to Recovery for drought-affected communities. In addition, we are also piloting a \$7 million small business support program, providing two-year interest free loans for agriculture-dependent small businesses, providing \$15 million support for schools and early child care centres and funding \$15 million in Tackling Times Together grants.

3. Building a more drought resilient Australia

The Government is enhancing long-term resilience and preparedness to withstand drought periods in the years ahead. This includes the \$5 billion Future Drought Fund and water infrastructure investment programs.

More information is available at www.drought.gov.au

It's time to build more dams

I established the National Water Grid to ensure our regions are best placed to grow and thrive in the coming decades.

Water is the lifeblood of our nation and we owe it to our regional producers and communities to deliver long-term, sustainable water infrastructure to help farmers recover and build resilience from drought.

The National Water Grid will deliver strategic planning and project management for water infrastructure across the nation.

It will bring together the world's best scientists, water experts and local stakeholder engagement to harvest and harness our most critical asset for future generations — ensuring science, not politics — drives future decision making on water policy and infrastructure.



LAY OF THE LAND: With The Rock farmer Michael Mazzocchi on his farm last year.



BIG DRY: With Weddin Shire Mayor, Councillor Mark Liebich, at the Quandialla water standpipe, which will be upgraded under the Drought Communities Programme.

Supporting small business

The Government is supporting small businesses in drought areas through part two of its drought plan. The \$300 million Drought Communities Programme Extension, \$200 million round of the Building Better Regions Fund and additional \$138.9 million for Roads to Recovery in drought-affected communities are all designed to do one thing – give a boost to businesses in rural and regional towns. This happens when new projects are being built, people have money in their back pocket and can spend that money in the local café, the IGA, the gift shop or the pub up the road.

In addition, the Government is providing new Small Business Drought Loans for small businesses dependent on agriculture. This will let these small businesses borrow, interest free for two years and up to \$500,000, to pay for business expenses or refinance. This could potentially save businesses up to \$30,000 a year compared to a commercial small business loan.

Key Government initiatives

- \$47 million extend the Drought Communities Programme to more councils, including 11 in the Riverina and Central West
- \$20 million to keep kids in school and \$5 million for childcare
- \$1 billion worth of drought loans up to \$2 million with no repayments or interest for the first two years to make it cheaper for farmers to buy fodder, transport stock, build water infrastructure, agist cattle, mend fences or refinance existing debt
- A new Small Business Drought Loan up to \$500,000 with the same conditions
- \$200 million extra for the Building Better Regions Fund
- \$138.9 million extra for Roads to Recovery
- Improved Farm Household Allowance and to make it available to more farmers more often

Handy Contacts

- Rural Financial Counsellors can be contacted at **1800 686 175**
- The Government's Drought Support hotline is **1800 900 090** or visit **www.drought.gov.au**
- Farmer Assistance Hotline: **13 23 16**
- Australian Small Business and Family Ombudsman: **1300 650 460**
- Rural Assistance Authority: **1800 678 593**



COVIDSafe app to help slow spread

The voluntary coronavirus app, COVIDSafe, is an important tool to help keep you and your family safe from further spread of virus.

By installing this app, you will save lives and you will protect livelihoods.

I thank the more than 5.5 million people who have downloaded the app at the time of publication.

The app uses Bluetooth technology in your phone to speed up the contact tracing process essential to stamping out any COVID-19 outbreaks in our region. COVIDSafe works by quickly identifying people who have been in close contact with someone diagnosed with coronavirus.

Unless and until a person is diagnosed with COVID-19, no contact information collected in the app can be accessed. Once a person agrees and uploads the data, only the relevant state or territory public health officials will have access to information. The only information they can access is that of close contacts.

Once the pandemic is over the app and the information on it will be deleted permanently.

For more details, please visit www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/covidsafe-app.

Extremely grateful for your dedication

Thanks to everyone who has committed to doing your part to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

It is through your efforts that Australia is in such a good position moving forward as we continue to adjust to living through a pandemic.

I particularly want to acknowledge those who have been on the front line – emergency service personnel, health professionals, cleaners, supermarket staff, truckies and those in essential working roles who have continued to keep the economy ticking along as best as possible. I have been heartened by how many businesses have shown ingenuity when it comes to adapting to significant changes.



The App can be downloaded from the App stores

Stop the spread and help save lives with the **COVIDSafe** app

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