



# Tasmanian Social and Economic Support Measures Update

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As at 30 April 2020





# I BACKGROUND

The health, safety and wellbeing of Tasmanians is the Government's highest priority. The Government receives daily advice from health professionals in relation to COVID-19 and is acting on that advice. It will continue to manage the risk of the virus based on the best and latest evidence and medical advice available. In addition to the health impacts, the necessary actions taken to slow the spread of the disease is resulting in significant economic and social consequences across Tasmania.

The Tasmanian Government's social and economic support packages are unprecedented in the history of our State. The two packages total \$1 billion, complementing the Federal Government's multi-billion dollar response, are of a scale not seen in the history of our State in both the amount of funding and the breadth of measures. The Package comprises initiatives to support health, businesses and jobs, households and individuals, and the community.

## 2 SUMMARY

As at 30 April 2020, the Government has provided practical supports to households and individual, communities and businesses:

- 16,725 applications have been received for assistant grants, including:
  - 1,403 applications from individuals or households; and
  - 15,322 applications from businesses;
- 20 eligible loan applications for \$111.6 million have been received from Local Government;
- 221 loans under the NILS program to Tasmanians to enable them to purchase essential products and services at no interest have been provided;
- 298 applications have been submitted for the Small Business Interest Free Loan (\$42 million in business support requested);
- 11,500 households across Tasmania in social housing have been provided with rent relief;
- 1,500 Government property leases impacted by COVID-19 have been provided with rent relief to the value of approximately \$4.8 million;
- 137 businesses with 440 vehicles have applied for Heavy Vehicle Fee Relief by extending their registration for 12 months. The amount of revenue forgone is \$499,000. In addition, 291 businesses with 2,141 vehicles have applied to freeze the vehicle registration;
- 3,181 calls to support people in need has been provided by the Red Cross, Salvation Army and Rural Business Tas;
- 149 Tasmanian businesses have taken advantage of their free two-hour session with a Digital coach since January 2020; and
- In the week 24 April – 1 May 2020 10,738 ready to eat meals have been delivered and this represents a 330 per cent increase from pre COVID-19 numbers. In the same period 1,022 food hampers by Loaves and Fishes, Foodbank and Volunteering Tasmania have been delivered which represents a 69 per cent increase from pre COVID-19 numbers.



## 3 Households and Individuals

### Pandemic Isolation Assistance Grants

As at 30 April, 267 grants have been paid to Tasmanians totalling \$108,895, with 118 grants issued in the South, 81 grants issued in the North and 68 grants issued in the North West.

To date 652 Pandemic Isolation Assistance Grants have been paid to temporary visa holders totalling \$221,150. Emergency relief and assistance will be provided through partnered non-government organisations where required as well. A survey has been undertaken to identify gaps and advice will be provided on the allocation of this funding to NGOs in the next week.

The Tasmanian Government is working with industry sectors or employers who want to retain their employees because of their specialist skills for when their business is able to start up again. Additional support will be provided under partnership arrangements to them so that we don't lose skilled workers that we need.

### Fees and charges relief

For households and individuals the Government as at 30 April 2020, has refunded approximately \$5.5 million through the School Levy Relief to 11,300 parent's bank account (just over half of eligible parents) with the remaining \$3.5 million to be refunded in May 2020. In addition, the Government will not require parents to pay approximately \$5 million in outstanding levies.

### Utility costs

In order to assist households and businesses on regulated electricity tariffs, the Government will cap regulated electricity prices for 2020-21 to ensure that they do not increase over 2019-20 prices. The cost of this measure will be dependent on market conditions at the time. Approximately, 244,500 households will benefit from this measure.

### Rent relief for social housing

The Government has not increased rent for social housing tenants, and will not count Federal and State Government emergency payments as income for the purposes of calculating rent contributions. This will provide around 11,500 households across Tasmania in social housing with more money in their hands. This will continue to support people in these difficult times, at a cost of around \$6.7 million.

### Additional housing for Tasmanians

The Government has increased funding to the Private Rental Incentive Scheme to increase the pool of available houses under that program. This will assist in meeting the needs of those on the housing register. The additional \$2 million will allow a further 75 properties to be provided under the scheme. There have been seven households assisted into Private Rental Incentives since the COVID19 Stimulus Package was announced.

As at 30 April 2020, the Government has committed:

- \$2.62 million to expand the current Safe Night Space pilot, which currently provides a safe, overnight place for those sleeping rough in Hobart. We extended the program to cover Hobart, Launceston and Burnie, and from an overnight service into a 24/7 full wrap around support service. These funds will go to Hobart City Mission, the Salvation Army Tasmania and Launceston City Mission as the partners delivering the expanded Safe Night Space service;
- \$1.13 million towards uncapped brokerage to assist Housing Connect's capacity to provide statewide brokered emergency accommodation, including increased mental health and wrap around support services during the emergency period; and



- \$513,760 to support young people who are under 16 and at risk of homelessness by increasing capacity to deliver services.

### **Halt on residential evictions for a 90-day period and Rent Increases**

The *Residential Tenancy Act 1997* was amended for an 'emergency period' to put in place a moratorium on the eviction of tenants for failing to be able to pay their rent. The Government has also prevented any rent increases until at least 30 June 2020. A relief fund is also being established to assist renters suffering from severe hardship.

### **Code of Conduct for commercial tenancies**

The Government has developed the COVID-19 Disease Emergency (Commercial Leases) Bill 2020 which gives effect to the national Code of Conduct for commercial tenancies agreed upon by National Cabinet. The purpose of the Code is to govern the conduct of commercial tenants and landlords, and provide additional protections and rent reductions for tenants experiencing financial hardship. The Government has also prevented rent increases and evictions of commercial tenants.

### **No Interest Loan Scheme (NILS)**

During April, NILS Tasmania issued 221 loans to eligible Tasmanians to enable them to purchase essential products and services at no interest. This is a six per cent increase on an average month. Of the loans provided 29 per cent went to North-West Tasmanians; 40 per cent went to Southern Tasmanians; and 31 per cent went to Northern Tasmanians. The total value of loans issued for April was \$246,000.

### **Emergency Support**

Assistance has been provided to over 444 people so far to access food hampers, financial counselling, and psychosocial and mental health support as required through the Government. This support has been provided by community sector organisations such as Salvation Army, Rural Business Tasmania and Red Cross. In addition, as at 30 April 2020, there have been 39 instances of emergency accommodation assisting 50 people.

The Red Cross has provided over 3,000 calls to support people in mandatory government quarantine. As at 6 May 2020, the Salvation Army has received 174 referrals and Rural Business Tas have received seven.



## 4 COMMUNITY

### Community Support Fund

As at 30 April 2020, the Department of Health has reached agreement with Community Transport Services Tasmania and is finalising additional support for Meals on Wheels.

The Department of Communities Tasmania coordinates the emergency food relief response through a network of the larger providers. As at 30 April 2020, the Department of Communities Tasmania has:

- entered into grant deeds with TasCOSS, Loaves and Fishes, Foodbank and Volunteering Tasmania and had paid approximately \$1.2 million to these organisations; and
- is finalising agreements with Youth Network of Tasmania, COTA Tasmania, Hamlet, Scrubby Hill, Tas Men's Sheds Association and Jordan River Waterbridge.

Under these agreements for the week 24 April – 1 May 2020, 10,738 ready to eat meals have been delivered and this represents a 330 per cent increase from pre COVID-19. In the same period 1,022 food hampers by Loaves and Fishes, Foodbank and Volunteering Tasmania have been delivered which represents a 69 per cent increase from pre COVID-19.

930 volunteers have responded to the call to mobilise Tasmania's very own volunteer army for the pandemic response, on top of more than 1200 emergency volunteers who had already registered to respond to natural disasters.

COTA is working with the PIU to develop communications materials for older Tasmanians – including ensuring that critical information is provided in multiple formats such as by paper, over the phone, and radio. COTA has also been part of the development of a national hotline for older people.

### Mental Health Support

The new Lifeline Service (1800 98 44 34 – A Tasmanian Lifeline) commenced on 1 May 2020. This new service will provide information on the resources available to support those impacted by the unprecedented changes in the way Tasmanians go about their daily lives, including social isolation, loss of employment, impact on mental health, financial challenges and, in the case of health professionals, working in a high-risk environment.

Agreements are in place with Rural Alive and Well and the Migrant Resource Centre to provide additional non-clinical services statewide in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on migrant Tasmanians or people in rural and remote areas who require additional support.

The Mental Health Council of Tasmania (MHCT) is administering the Technology Grants program. Assessment of the 51 applications received for the \$450,000 grant funding is currently being finalised.

Work is underway as part of the Government's Housing and Homeless Support Package announced on 30 April 2020 to increase clinical and non-clinical supports for Tasmanians who are homeless and need to isolate as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The \$600,000 will support increased non-clinical support services, while a further \$826,500 will allow for additional extended hours clinical services.

Funding is also supporting the Alcohol and Drug Service (ADS) to develop options to support the continued delivery of the State's Pharmacotherapy program during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the use of alternative dosage options to meet the needs of pharmacists and consumers.



## Family Violence

Safe at Home is the Tasmanian Government's integrated criminal justice response to family violence. It involves a range of services working together to protect and support victims of family violence, including young people and children, while making offenders responsible for their behaviour. The Government has provided \$1.9 million to expand this program.

The Rapid Rehousing program is an existing Government policy under the *Affordable Housing Action Plan* and the *Safe Homes, Families, Communities: Tasmania's action plan for family and sexual violence 2019-2022*. The additional \$260,000 will allow a further 20 properties to be available by 30 June 2020.

For community-based specialist family violence support services, \$310,000 has been provided to Yemaya Women's Support Service, Engender Equality, Huon Domestic Violence, Anglicare (Relationship Abuse of an Intimate Nature) and Safe Choices. The Flexible Support Packages were launched on the 27 April 2020, and as at 30 April 2020 three applications had been received: one each in the North, South and East. The applications received totalled \$14,790. In addition, \$105,000 has been spent dedicated to family violence primary prevention awareness raising efforts.

## Supporting vulnerable children

As at 30 April 2020:

- ICT Fund approved 38 applications worth \$6,000. Thirteen are yet to be assessed by the Assessment Panel. The majority of the applications have requested laptops or iPad;
- 1,141 foster and formal kinship carers have received the \$200 payment, worth \$228,200;
- a review into the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Program is scheduled to commence mid-May. A grant for Foster and Kinship Carers Tasmania (FKAT) to deliver additional supports and training to informal carers is being finalised and the payment of the \$70,000 will occur shortly;
- planning has been completed to extend the Carer Support Hotline and the After Hours Response Service to service additional demand. Current demand for after-hours support is being monitored to ensure an appropriate response can be provided when required. To date there has not been an increase in demand that is unmanageable;
- \$260,000 has been provided through a one-off immediate \$200 payment to foster and kinship carers for each child or young person in their care, so families can purchase essential cleaning products;
- 12 applications have been received for the Flexible Active Family Fund. Six have been assessed with \$1500 funding approved; and
- we engaged with CREATE (\$50,000) and the CatholicCare's Therapeutic Residential Care Service (\$480,000) to finalise grant deeds and outcomes.

The Department of Education, partnering with the Department of Communities Tasmania, is providing students who do not have access to a computer or internet access with a computer and sim card/internet dongle. As at 30 April 2020, over 2,700 devices have been loaned to students and 400 internet dongles have been provided for distribution to students through schools.

## Neighbourhood Houses

\$700,000 has been provided to Neighbourhood Houses (\$20,000 for each of the 35 Houses in the State) to ensure they are able to continue to support people within their communities who are isolated and need extra support.



### **Sport and Recreation Support**

Applicants had until 30 April 2020 to submit applications, with grants being assessed on a rolling basis and within 10 days of application. As at 6 May 2020, \$570,000 has been paid with a number of applications still being considered. Grants that have been approved include \$150,000 to Basketball Tasmania to support 12 jobs, \$150,000 to Football Federation Tasmania to support 15 jobs, just under \$100,000 to Swimming Tasmania in support of four jobs, \$150,000 to Netball Tasmania to support 17 jobs, and further monetary support for jobs at Triathlon Tasmania and Motorcycling Tasmania.

### **Racing Industry**

The Tasmanian Racing industry has been ordered to cease operations since the 2 April 2020. In response, the Government, through Tasracing, has announced a support package of \$2 million per month, which is broadly equivalent to the continuation of the full value of stakes money foregone. As at 1 May 2020, payments have been made for 2,240 racing animals in work over all three codes via 70 thoroughbred trainers, 105 harness trainers and 106 greyhound trainers.

### **National Parks and Wilderness Areas**

The rental relief provided for crown assets also applies to all commercial and private lessees and licencees on reserved and crown land managed by the Department of Primary Industries, Park, Water and Environment, and equates to six months rental waiver for over 1,160 businesses.

### **Returned Service League Support**

The Tasmanian Government's Supporting Veterans – COVID-19 Grants program is providing up to \$500,000 to eligible RSLs and ex-servicing organisations. Grants of up to \$10 000 are being provided to individual commercial trading RSL sub-branches and ex-serving organisations impacted by the coronavirus with grants of up to \$25 000 available to help RSLs and other organisations provide a new service or program to meet identified needs because of COVID-19 restrictions. Applications opened on the 27 April 2020.

### **Driver's Licence Renewal**

For those whose driver's licences and learner licenses are due for renewal between 1 April and 30 September 2020, this can now be done from home using BPAY through Service Tasmania on 1300 13 55 13 or by email.

### **Accommodation for frontline workers**

Emergency hotel accommodation is available for frontline workers who directly deliver essential health, welfare and biosecurity services if they need to stay away from home. To date, 26 frontline workers have been assisted, totalling 162 accommodation nights.



## 5 Businesses and the Economy

### Government fees and charges for small business

The Government has frozen, waived or capped fees and charges for small businesses including waiving the roads component of motor tax and vehicle registration where a business has been significantly impacted by measures taken to manage COVID-19. Businesses looking to suspend or are experiencing significant trading restrictions due to the COVID-19 can access the Business Vehicle Registration Relief Package. For heavy vehicles they can apply to freeze or extend for 12 months and for light vehicles apply to freeze the vehicle registration.

As at 6 May 2020, 137 businesses with 440 vehicles have applied for Heavy Vehicle Fee Relief by extending their registration for 12 months. The amount of revenue forgone is \$499,000. As at 6 May 2020, 291 businesses with 2,141 vehicles have applied to freeze the vehicle registration. The estimated cost is approximately \$700,000.

Registrations can be reactivated at no cost to the business when it restarts. For heavy vehicles (over 4.5 tonnes) the Government will waive fees for registration and the road component of motor tax for 12 months. Operators will still need to pay the regulatory component of motor tax which goes to fund the operations of the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator.

### Utility costs for small businesses

The Government has put in place measures to waive the payment of the first quarterly electricity (or the first three monthly electricity bills) issued on or after 1 April 2020 to the customer, in respect of energy use in the relevant billing period. Eligible businesses will be provided the bill waiver through arrangements between the Government and electricity retailers. It is estimated that the waiver will apply to approximately 34,000 small businesses. The total estimated cost is expected to be between \$22 million and \$27 million.

Arrangements have been made with TasWater to waive the payment of the first quarterly water and sewerage bills issued on or after 1 April 2020 of small business customers that are eligible for the electricity waiver. The eligibility criteria is the same as that for the small business electricity bill waiver. The estimated cost of the bill waiver and the price freeze for 2020-21 is expected to be \$25 million.

### Payroll tax relief

As at 30 April 2020:

- 245 applications had been received by the State Revenue Office for the payroll tax waiver for Tasmanian employers with wages of up to \$5 million with a total refund of approximately \$6.1 million paid to date; and
- 45 applications had been received by the State Revenue Office for the payroll tax waiver for Tasmanian hospitality, tourism, and seafood industry employers with to a total refund of approximately \$5.4 million paid to date.

### Relief for commercial property owners and tenants

The Government announced that it will waive land tax for 2020-21 for commercial property owners financially impacted by COVID-19, where the land tax is paid by the business owner. The Government has subsequently agreed to extend the waiver to all commercial property owners impacted by COVID-19. The actual reduction in revenue will be identified when land tax assessment notices are calculated throughout the 2020-21 financial year with an estimate of \$20 million. The Commissioner of State Revenue will also consider deferring outstanding land tax due for 2019-20 until 30 June 2020 and will provide other payment arrangements if a taxpayer is experiencing financial hardship. No interest will apply to the 2019-20 debt. As at 30 April 2020, 259 applications for deferral of land tax due to financial hardship have been received, of which 256 have been processed.



## **Government Leases**

For Government leased property (to private/commercial tenants) we will waive rents for six months. The rent waiver will apply to almost 1,500 leases impacted by COVID-19, providing rent relief to the value of approximately \$4.8 million. The waiving of rent is applied from 1 March 2020 for a period of six months with refunds for rent already paid across the state.

## **Additional support for small businesses**

As at 30 April 2020:

- 298 applications have been submitted for the Small Business Interest Free Loan;
- \$150,000 has been allocated over two years to highlight successful Digital Ready for Business program. In addition, 149 Tasmanian businesses have taken advantage of their free two-hour session with a Digital coach since January 2020;
- 323 Small Business Hardship Grants of \$15,000; (as at 5 May 2020, 429 grants have been approved and paid). This program has closed to new applications at midnight 4 May 2020;
- 10,355 Emergency Grants of \$2,500 had been approved to support businesses (as at 5 May 2020, 11,999 grants have been approved and paid). This program has closed to new applications at midnight 4 May 2020;
- 2,076 grants have been approved and paid for business Continuity Grants of \$750 to support businesses to access continuity planning. This program has closed to new applications at midnight 4 May 2020;
- \$100,000 has been allocated to Rural Financial Counselling services, with the remainder to be paid in July 2020; and
- \$100,000 is being provided to our local Chambers of Commerce.

The Government has provided funding of \$60,000 for the online Agfest portal (Agfest in the Cloud).

## **Local Government Loans Program**

As at 29 April 2020, 20 Local Government Authorities had applied for assistance of \$111.6 million that meet all the eligibility criteria of the Program. Applications received at that date include infrastructure projects such as upgrades to roads, bridges and jetties, stormwater improvements, and car park redevelopments. The cost of individual projects ranged from \$10,000 to \$6 million. Applications have also been received to fund rates relief programs for the business and community sectors. It is anticipated that all eligible applications will be processed by 15 May 2020.

## **Primary Healthcare Grants**

As at 30 April, 276 applications had been received. Of these applications, 263 had been successful, five were under assessment and eight had been declined as ineligible. As at this time, \$2.47 million of the grants pool had been allocated. The Department of Health is continuing to process applications to the grants program as they are received.

## **Telehealth capacity**

Increase to Telehealth capability, with 20 virtual rooms having been expanded to now accommodate up to 5,000 virtual appointment bookings.



### **Tourism and hospitality support**

2,226 Tourism and Hospitality Business have been contacted as part of this program with 850 business either receiving a one-on-one consultation, attending a webinar or receiving a business continuity guide. A substantial number of applications for small business support have been from the Tourism and Hospitality sector.

### **Seafood and fishery support**

There are 680 wild fisheries licence holders that are eligible to receive fee relief from the \$4.3 million of stimulus support for the wild fisheries sectors. Letters of advice and required claim documentation were sent directly to all 680 eligible licence holders on 9 April 2020. Approximately 400 claims have been received and the first refunds were expected to be distributed by the beginning of May 2020. The balance of the stimulus package of licence fee waivers will roll out in August 2020.

All 119 eligible shellfish marine farming licence holders have already received annual renewal notices with all fees waived as their licence fees were due for renewal on 30 April 2020. This equates to \$172,270 of fee relief. As of 30 April 2020, fee waiver applications had been lodged for a total of 96 marine farming leases held by eligible shellfish marine farm lease holders.

Every shellfish marine farming licence holder, subject to the ShellMAP levy, has received advice that the levy for the coming year has been waived. This amounts to over \$7,000 in levy waivers per licence and collectively this relief amounts to \$770,000 across the shellfish marine farming industry.

The annual accreditation fee required under the *Primary Produce Safety (Seafood) Regulations 2014* will also be waived for the 2019-20 financial year. The estimated cost of waiving the fee is approximately \$39,000 and it will benefit seafood producers including approximately 66 bivalve mollusc producers and 65 abalone divers.

### **Cultural and creative industries**

As at 30 April 2020, the Arts and Digital Production fund had 77 applications received and applications closed on 4 May. These applications will be assessed in mid-May 2020. For the Screen Development fund 25 applications have been received to the program. Applications are currently being assessed and will be considered by the Screen Tasmania Expert Advisory Group in late May 2020. For the contemporary musician fund to record music and video, applications closed on 4 May with 96 applications received. These will be assessed in mid-May. All remaining funds will be allocated by July 2020.

### **Critical air freight for industry and our islands**

Sharp Airlines is now receiving direct support of up to \$112,577 per week to maintain freight and passenger services to the Bass Strait Islands. The financial support provided to Sharp Airlines is subject to an agreed flight schedule and passenger revenue.

A proposal is being prepared to provide support to TasFast for air services between Melbourne, Tasmania and King Island for essential health supplies and live seafood; and work is continuing to seek a direct international freight connection from mainland Tasmania, with a focus on a link between Hobart and Sydney to support live seafood exports through the \$110 million International Freight Assistance Mechanism.

### **Taxi license fees**

The Government has waived annual taxi licence fees for the calendar year 2020 at a cost of \$240,000. As at 28 April 2020, 275 licenses fee refunds have been processed to a value of approximately \$180,000.

In addition, a number of additional taxi support initiatives have been adopted by the Government including Taxi free rebates which has seen administration fees contained in the *Taxi and Hire Vehicle Industries Act 2003* have been waived and not payable for 2020. Refunds of fees already paid are sustainably progressed.

The Taxi Industry registration relief enables vehicle registration falling between 1 March and 30 September 2020, taxi operators can either 1) continue operating a vehicle or apply to have their vehicle registration extended for a 12 month period, at no charge or 2) to 'pause' the registration of their taxi and later reinstate



the registration at no cost, with the 'paused' period being added to the reinstated registration period. Taxis will not be required to pay Public Passenger Vehicle safety inspection (around \$130).

The Government has also implemented a deferral of 193 accreditation audits (typically costing \$350 each) that were due between 1 April and 30 September 2020, for six months.

### **Public building maintenance program**

As part of the Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, \$50 million has been allocated to fund critical maintenance on public buildings and other publically owned assets, in an effort to the construction sector.

As at 30 April 2020, the Tasmanian Government has allocated \$10 million to the Department of Education for maintenance in Tasmanian Government schools to improve public facilities and mitigate the impacts of COVID-19. The Inland Fisheries Service (IFS) has been allocated \$595,000 to expedite works to support jobs in the local community. In addition, Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens will receive \$302,000 for essential maintenance projects and the Parks and Wildlife Service has been allocated \$1.5 million to undertake a wide range of building and asset maintenance activities in parks and reserves across the state, including accommodation; visitor centres; roadworks and signage. The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery has been allocated \$3 million to bring forward urgent maintenance activities.

### **Liquor and gaming response measures**

As at 30 April 2020, the Department of Treasury and Finance has received 857 completed refund applications for liquor and gaming licence and permit refunds and 138 permits have been issued at no costs. Support totals \$776,494.

### **Rapid Response Skills Initiative**

Over 236 applications for subsidised training have been received in the period 1 March to 4 May, and 150 have been assessed and approved to date. To help more workers into new jobs as quickly as possible, Searson Buck has been engaged. Since 17 April, Searson Buck has supported 109 job seekers.