

COVID-19 – Insights and updates

Date: 21st April 2020

Key purpose

Scan relevant sources to identify information pertaining to:

1. What might happen?
 - Best, mid and worst case scenarios for progression of the COVID-19 pandemic over the next period of weeks, months or years
 - Potential impacts of these scenarios on the Victorian workplaces (generally and in specific industries)
 - Potential impacts on the Victorian health system
2. What does this mean for WSV?
 - Likely impact on health and safety
 - Likely impact on recovery
 - Potential responses by WSV

The initial scans have been arranged into four main categories

1. Government updates and policy responses
2. Impact on Australia's economy
3. Impact on health and safety
4. Impact on industry and workplaces

Government updates and policy responses to COVID-19

COVID-10 Government response tracker

The Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker collates and compares how different governments around the world respond to the virus. This tool tracks and updates policy responses.

Link: https://apo.org.au/node/303043?utm_source=APO+Subscribers&utm_campaign=c23ec0d101-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_04_07_11_55&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1452ee3b6b-c23ec0d101-84272525&mc_cid=c23ec0d101&mc_eid=8ae7396528

WHO updates

Rolling updates and technical guidance from WHO, including rights, roles and responsibilities of health workers; and key considerations for occupational safety and health

Link: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

Restrictions - Australia

Australia's coronavirus restrictions will remain until these three things are established:

1 Broader testing; 2 better contact tracing; 3 better response to outbreaks

ABC News (16/4) Link: https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-16/coronavirus-what-australia-has-to-do-before-restrictions-lifted/12154692?utm_source=TheSquiz&utm_medium=Email&UTM_campaign=200417

Tracking app to trace contacts

COVID-19 tracking app is described as a 'fundamental weapon' despite privacy fears.

Channel 9 News (15/4) Link: https://www.9news.com.au/national/coronavirus-new-location-tracking-app-tracetoegether-limiting-community-transmission-of-covid19/65f4db63-c0b9-43e6-95ff-b2602e939e8d?utm_source=TheSquiz&utm_medium=Email&UTM_campaign=200417

However, the Government has given reassurance that no data are uploaded for any purpose other than tracking. Only State Health have access to data and contact those who have been in close proximity to an active case for more than 15 minutes. Legal concerns have been raised about the 'voluntary' nature of the app if employers insist that workers have the app before they can return to work.

https://www.yourlifechoices.com.au/health/covid19/government-in-hard-sell-on-tracing-app?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=volume%2020%20issue%2081%20daily%20enews%20wednesday%2022%20april&utm_content=volume%2020%20issue%2081%20daily%20enews%20wednesday%2022%20april+version+a+cid_60a60b37c4e37a845413524d970b9253&utm_source=campaign%20monitor&utm_term=coronavirus%20tracing%20app

Case detection rate across Australia

A technical report by Price et al. describes a method, which was adapted from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and uses Case Fatality Rates in a region to estimate symptomatic cases in Australia. Price et al. estimated that symptomatic cases were being detected at a rate of 93% nationally; and over 80% in all states/territories. In addition, the reproduction number was estimated to be less than 1 in NSW, Victoria, Queensland SA and WA; and just over 1 in Tasmania.

Technical report: [file://ad.monash.edu/home/User058/pbyw0001/Desktop/COVID-19/Estimating changes in the transmission of COVID-19 April14-public-release.pdf](file://ad.monash.edu/home/User058/pbyw0001/Desktop/COVID-19/Estimating_changes_in_the_transmission_of_COVID-19_April14-public-release.pdf)

Impact on Australia's economy

Employment and unemployment

With unemployment at 5.2% and underemployment at 8.8%, the ABS figures show that approximately 14% of the workforce are underutilised.

ABC News (16/4) Link: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-16/abs-jobs-numbers-unemployment-coronavirus/12153104>

Grattan Institute calculated that between 14 and 26% of Australian workers (1.9-to-3.4 million people) could be out of work in the coming weeks as a result of social distancing measures to contain the spread of COVID-19.

Accurate data are not yet available and may be obscured by policy decisions, such as JobKeeper (people listed as employed, but not working); others may leave workforce, but not apply for JobSeeker. Expect unemployment to rise over next few months.

Grattan Institute (20/4) Link: <https://grattan.edu.au/report/shutdown-estimating-the-covid-19-employment-shock/>

IMF forecasts big coronavirus growth hit amid world in a 'great lockdown'. Australia's economy could shrink by 6.7% in 2020, while unemployment could average 7.6%.

ABC News (14/4) Link: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-14/imf-forecasts-big-coronavirus-growth-hit/12147818>

History suggests youth unemployment will surge and the impact may last for up to 10 years post-COVID crisis. Many younger workers are employed in industries that have had the greatest impact of COVID, including the arts, retail and hospitality.

ABC News (16/4) Link: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-16/history-suggests-youth-unemployment-will-surge-coronavirus/12151668>

Modelling by the Department of Treasury and Finance has estimated that a quarter of a million jobs in Victoria could be lost due to COVID.

ABC News (22/4) Link: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-22/coronavirus-modelling-impact-victorias-unemployment-property/12169684>

Analysis of unemployment pre-COVID. This report maps out unemployment before the peak of COVID.

Australian Council of Social Service (7/4) Link: https://apo.org.au/node/303214?utm_source=APO+Subscribers&utm_campaign=33452ad7dc-

[EMAIL CAMPAIGN 2020 04 14 11 29&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1452ee3b6b-33452ad7dc-84272525&mc_cid=33452ad7dc&mc_eid=8ae7396528](https://apo.org.au/node/303159?utm_source=APO+Subscribers&utm_campaign=33452ad7dc-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_04_14_11_29&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1452ee3b6b-33452ad7dc-84272525&mc_cid=33452ad7dc&mc_eid=8ae7396528)

A range of policy measures have been introduced to protect casual workers affected by COVID. Approximately 2.6 million people are employed as casual workers in Australia (August 2019), representing 24.4% of all employees. Examples are sales assistants, hospitality workers, carers and food preparation assistants. Most of these work in retail and accommodation and food services; and large numbers also work in social assistance services, construction, health, education, road transport and other service industries. Examples of assistance are: eligibility for JobSeeker payments and Youth Allowance (for up to 6 months)

Parliamentary library (27/3) Link:

[https://apo.org.au/node/303159?utm_source=APO+Subscribers&utm_campaign=33452ad7dc-EMAIL CAMPAIGN 2020 04 14 11 29&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1452ee3b6b-33452ad7dc-84272525&mc_cid=33452ad7dc&mc_eid=8ae7396528](https://apo.org.au/node/303159?utm_source=APO+Subscribers&utm_campaign=33452ad7dc-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_04_14_11_29&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1452ee3b6b-33452ad7dc-84272525&mc_cid=33452ad7dc&mc_eid=8ae7396528)

Impacts on labour market in Australia

ABS provides Labour Force statistical data from three sources:

- *Business Impacts of COVID-19 Survey*: information from business (e.g. changes to workforce arrangements, staffing levels and location of work)
- *Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey*: information from households (e.g. changes in jobs, hours worked, and employment arrangements)
- *Weekly Payroll Jobs and Wages in Australia*: information on changes in jobs and wages paid, for all businesses who report through the Single Touch Payroll system to the Australian Tax Office (approximately 99% of large and medium sized businesses, and around 70% of small businesses). This information will complement existing wages information in the Wage Price Index, Average Weekly Earnings, the Labour Account, and aggregates from the National Accounts – Compensation of Employees and Average Compensation per Employee.

ABS Link: <https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/d3310114.nsf/home/ABS+Media+Statements+-+new+Australian+labour+market+information>

Spending on consumer goods and services drops

Overall spending is down by 20%. Despite panic buying and queues at bottle shops, alcohol sales are down; also clothing sales (down 58%); personal care (down 61%); transport (down 44%)

<https://www.yourlifechoices.com.au/finance/news/where-spending-has-plummeted>

Vulnerable occupations

An infographic uses data from the US Occupational Information Network to estimate the risk of exposure to COVID-19 across different occupations. Although approximately 29% of Americans now work from home, those in 'essential services' are at high risk of exposure.

Visual Capitalist (15/4) Link: <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/the-front-line-visualizing-the-occupations-with-the-highest-covid-19-risk/>

Companies pay too much in dividends

Many very large companies have too little cash to ride out sharp downturns. They have paid out profits to shareholders in the form of dividends, leaving them with less to build cash buffers, pay higher wages and reinvest in the business.

In times of crisis, where the solvency of corporations is a live question, preferencing shareholders over creditors and employees by paying dividends or buying back shares or borrowing to pay dividends is likely to be a breach of duties because it sucks even more liquidity out of the business and increases leverage. Post-COVID-19, companies should be made to wind back returns to shareholders in order to build adequate buffers, invest in their businesses and pay their workers more.

The Conversation (14/4) Link: <https://theconversation.com/the-last-thing-companies-should-be-doing-right-now-is-paying-dividends-135928>

Legal guidance for not-for-profit sector

This briefing paper aims to provide guidance to community organisations on some of the most pressing issues raised by COVID-19, including employment, contracts and insurance.

Justice Connect Link:

https://apo.org.au/node/303117?utm_source=APO+Subscribers&utm_campaign=c23ec0d101-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_04_07_11_55&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1452ee3b6b-c23ec0d101-84272525&mc_cid=c23ec0d101&mc_eid=8ae7396528

Three potential 'endgames' for COVID-19

1 Flatten the curve; 2 trace and track; 3 stop then restart

Grattan Institute (21/3) Link: <https://grattan.edu.au/report/covid-19-the-endgame-and-how-to-get-there/>

Two options in Australia

1. Increase herd immunity: more people will die, but health system will manage; however, restrictions will go on for a longer period
2. Eliminate the virus:

<https://grattan.edu.au/news/covid-19-there-are-only-two-options-from-here-one-is-more-deadly/>

Impact on health and safety

Safe Work Australia provides information on COVID-19 and work health and safety. The webpage has links to information on psychological health, psychosocial hazards, working from home risks, managing stress and tips for employers for managing workplace stress.

Safe Work Australia Link: <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/mental-health-and-covid-19>

Minister slams 'unacceptable' abuse of healthcare workers wearing uniforms in public. Workers accused of spreading the virus.

SBS News Link: <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/minister-slams-unacceptable-abuse-of-healthcare-workers-wearing-uniforms-in-public>

Data and modelling

Various reports and sources with infographics updated daily (e.g. cases, deaths, demographics of COVID infections)

Australian Dept of Health Link: https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications?f%5B0%5D=field_audience%3A451

Theoretical modelling of how the health system can respond to COVID-19. The report covers:

- Planning a response
- The government's response to COVID-19
- Modelling the impact on intensive care capacity
- Broader health system capacity building
- Continuing to build the evidence base

Dept of Health (7/4) Link: https://apo.org.au/node/303209?utm_source=APO+Subscribers&utm_campaign=33452ad7dc-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_04_14_11_29&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1452ee3b6b-33452ad7dc-84272525&mc_cid=33452ad7dc&mc_eid=8ae7396528

Point of care testing for vulnerable communities

World first rapid COVID-19 testing to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. POC test - Xpert SARS-CoV-2 test, uses rapid technology to detect COVID-19 infections at by using a nasal swab polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test in the early phases of the illness

Australian Dept of Health Link: <https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-greg-hunt-mp/media/world-first-rapid-covid-19-testing-to-protect-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-communities>

Infections and 'silent spreaders'

People without symptoms are thought to be unwittingly spreading coronavirus. Combining data from observed infections (China) and population mobility data revealed an estimated 79% of documented infections may have been transmitted by people showing no symptoms of illness. Link: <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/early/2020/03/24/science.abb3221>

Similarly, 48% of cases in Singapore were transmitted by people showing mild or no symptoms of the virus. Link: <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.03.05.20031815v1>

Since carriers are most contagious in the period of one to three days before symptoms appear, (<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.03.03.20029983v1>) isolating only sick people may not contain this virus as expected. Therefore, the key strategies of social distancing, working from home and limiting all opportunities for contact are the best tools for stopping the chain of transmission.

While young people are more likely to be infected, they are also more likely to have mild or no symptoms; whereas older people are more likely to die. (Source: London Business school slides). This is seen in Italy, which has higher fatality rates; an older population distribution; and a higher level of regular contact with the young compared with other countries.

Number of cases underreported

Using a simple reductive approach, data from Actuaries Digital suggests that there are far more COVID carriers in the community than estimated 'active' cases.

Actuaries Digital (15/4) Link: <https://www.actuaries.digital/2020/04/15/covid-19-is-more-widespread-in-australia-than-the-headlines-suggest/>

Treating symptoms

A new non-steroidal nasal spray (N115), which has been developed by EmphyCorp, increases nitric oxide in the nose. Nitric oxide kills bacteria and viruses; and may reduce the rate and severity of viral infections, including COVID-19. Having undergone successful clinical trials for idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, N115 may be used as a preventive strategy for essential workers and high-risk individuals. EmphyCorp is currently seeking to partner with another pharmaceutical company to bring N115 to market. Link: <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/emphycorp-n115-news-reducing-rate-172000337.html>

Mental health impacts

The UK's Evidence for Policy and Practice Information (EPPI) Centre has developed a 'Living Map' that brings together the evidence and ongoing research across a range of COVID-19 areas of concern. Link: http://epi.ioe.ac.uk/COVID19_MAP/covid_map_v5.html

At 9/4/2020, ten papers reported on a range of mental health issues related to COVID. These included vicarious trauma in healthcare workers; and the psychological impact of isolation (e.g. anxiety, panic disorder). One study also described online resources (e.g. Web-based chat) that may be used for psychological counselling.

The Australian Psychological Society (APA) have put together a fact sheet on tips for managing anxiety related to COVID. Link: https://www.psychology.org.au/getmedia/3821ed7a-1a8a-4e1d-b303-2943ea9ae6b7/20APS-IS-COVID-19-Public-P2_2.pdf

Briefings on mental health issues related to COVID have been prepared by the International Initiative for Mental Health Leadership.

Link: <https://www.iimhl.com/>

Impact on vulnerable communities

Digital inclusion: Australia's response to containing COVID-19 needs us to be more digitally connected than ever. Yet, more than 2.5 million Australians are not online and many of those who are lack the skills to benefit fully from this connectivity. Affordable access to the internet also remains a key concern, particularly for low-income households.

https://apo.org.au/node/303046?utm_source=APO+Subscribers&utm_campaign=c23ec0d101-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_04_07_11_55&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1452ee3b6b-c23ec0d101-84272525&mc_cid=c23ec0d101&mc_eid=8ae7396528

People already living in poverty; those with unstable employment; large debts, homeless, disabled, socially marginalised – all vulnerable groups will feel the effects most.

<https://www.yourlifechoices.com.au/health/covid19/wholl-be-hit-hardest-wholl-pay>

Indigenous Australians – perspectives on public policy

Indigenous Australians are likely to be impacted more seriously by COVID, particularly in areas of employment, social security, violence, Indigenous health workforce, school closures and energy security in remote communities.

Centre for Aboriginal Economic Research (7/4) Link:

https://apo.org.au/node/303125?utm_source=APO+Subscribers&utm_campaign=c23ec0d101-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_04_07_11_55&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1452ee3b6b-c23ec0d101-84272525&mc_cid=c23ec0d101&mc_eid=8ae7396528

Privacy and data protection

Responses to COVID must promote public health, prevent discrimination, ensure access to reliable and timely information, defend unrestricted access to an open, affordable, and secure internet, ensure the enjoyment of freedom of expression and of opinion, and protect privacy and personal data.

Access Now Link:

https://apo.org.au/node/303056?utm_source=APO+Subscribers&utm_campaign=c23ec0d101-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_04_07_11_55&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1452ee3b6b-c23ec0d101-84272525&mc_cid=c23ec0d101&mc_eid=8ae7396528

Opportunities

The expansion of telehealth services to protect patients and doctor health during COVID may remain after the crisis. While it has been resisted by doctors in the past, it is accepted now as a safe replacement for face-to-face consultations. Beyond COVID, telehealth may provide an alternative mode of healthcare.

Link: https://www.yourlifechoices.com.au/health/covid19/is-healthcare-changing-forever?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=yourlifechoices%20tuesday%20pm%20update%2021%20april%202020&utm_content=yourlifechoices%20tuesday%20pm%20update%2021%20april%202020+version+a+cid_132d0443cc11c4fdbf8b9ba9cb801d7e&utm_source=campaign%20monitor&utm_term=is%20it%20here%20to%20stay

Impact on industry and workplaces

Most affected sectors: tourism and hospitality; aviation/airlines; oil & gas; automotive; consumer products (except essential foodstuffs)

More highly skilled workers (except health professionals) more likely to have opportunities to work from home; whereas lower skilled workers (e.g. drivers, cleaners, retail workers) have less opportunity. (Source: London business school slides)

Working from home – risks and opportunities

Many workers have been able to perform their tasks from home; mostly those in higher paid occupations. This may exacerbate the inequalities in income across different occupations. Working from home may become more permanent post-COVID-19, also raising concerns about conditions and safety of the work environment; and clarity about the rules of 'normal working hours'. Supervision, monitoring and privacy of those working from home may be concerns in some organisations.

Centre for Future Work (13/4) Link:

https://apo.org.au/node/303205?utm_source=APO+Subscribers&utm_campaign=33452ad7dc-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_04_14_11_29&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1452ee3b6b-33452ad7dc-84272525&mc_cid=33452ad7dc&mc_eid=8ae7396528

Maintaining health and safety at work

Organisations that are put under financial stress may 'cut corners' when it comes to health and safety. Therefore, oversight of potential risks is important to maintain throughout the pandemic.

News: <https://www.theage.com.au/business/workplace/risky-business-sharp-debt-increases-can-hit-worker-safety-study-finds-20200421-p54lqc.html>

Return to work

This report outlines a strategy for RTW, including mass testing, contact tracing and maintaining social distancing restrictions. Social distancing may be easier in some workplaces (e.g. manufacturing, construction); whereas small business may find it more difficult. The report discusses which businesses are at lower risk for RTW.

Australian strategic policy institute (15/4) Link:

https://apo.org.au/node/303289?utm_source=APO+Subscribers&utm_campaign=9d0caedb83-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_04_21_11_48&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1452ee3b6b-9d0caedb83-84272525&mc_cid=9d0caedb83&mc_eid=8ae7396528

Trade relations with China and impact on imports/exports

The growing distrust of China's handling of information about COVID-19 has raised concerns about globalisation. In addition to previous allegations of intellectual property theft, attempts to coerce

governments and unsafe work practices, many countries are re-evaluating their trade relationships with China.

Future Directions International (7/4) Link:

https://apo.org.au/node/303150?utm_source=APO+Subscribers&utm_campaign=33452ad7dc-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_04_14_11_29&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1452ee3b6b-33452ad7dc-84272525&mc_cid=33452ad7dc&mc_eid=8ae7396528

Recovery strategies post-COVID

Given the complexity of the pandemic, there is reason to believe that the recovery phase will require unprecedented levels of orchestration and coordination during a challenging and potentially protracted recovery period. Planning for this recovery now – even under uncertainty as the crisis continues to unfold – will be repaid in more precise and considered actions, and a stronger bounce back. Furthermore, the actions that a company takes during this recovery period can set the foundation for sustained growth and performance long after the pandemic is over.

Deloitte's Link: <https://www2.deloitte.com/global/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/covid-19/covid-19--the-recovery-of-organizations-and-supply-chains.html#>

Workforce, supply chain etc

PWC provides information on crisis management, workforce, operations and supply chains, finance and liquidity, tax and trade.

PWC Link: <https://www.pwc.com.au/important-problems/coronavirus-covid-19.html>

Similarly, Ernst & Young provide resources and insights on crisis management, enterprise resilience and planning for recovery.

Ernst & Young Link: https://www.ey.com/en_gl/covid-19

Health and safety for healthcare professionals

Industry factsheet to support and protect healthcare professionals and service providers

University of NSW Link:

https://apo.org.au/node/303115?utm_source=APO+Subscribers&utm_campaign=c23ec0d101-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_04_07_11_55&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1452ee3b6b-c23ec0d101-84272525&mc_cid=c23ec0d101&mc_eid=8ae7396528