

IR POLICY AND GOVERNANCE UPDATE



INTRODUCTION

Just like that we have rolled into February. In this update we include a review of the RBA's decision to hold fast on interest rates for now, various state adjustments to reporting a COVID positive case in the workplace, considering your approach to COVID-19 vaccine booster doses, and New Zealand's approach to border opening in the coming months.

REPORTING A POSITIVE COVID CASE IN THE WORKPLACE

Attached to today's overall Member Bulletin is a member advisory detailing current requirements for reporting a COVID-19 case that arises in the workplace. Over the last months the requirements to report to a relevant government agency have changed in many jurisdictions.

Additionally, the advisory includes a review of an individual's requirement to register a positive result when undertaking a RAT test. The member advisory covers each state, territory and New Zealand on those issues.

INTEREST RATES REMAIN ON HOLD

In the first RBA Board meeting for the year on Tuesday, the RBA Board announced its decision to maintain the official cash rate at 0.1%. In coming to its decision, the RBA held the view that although the recent Omicron outbreak has affected the economy, it has not derailed economic recovery.

On Australian economic factors generally, the RBA stated:

- > The Australian economy remains resilient and spending is expected to pick up as case numbers trend lower.
- > Inflation has picked up more quickly than the RBA had expected, but remains lower than in many other countries. The headline CPI inflation rate is 3.5 per cent and is being affected by higher petrol prices, higher prices for newly constructed homes and the disruptions to global supply chains. In underlying terms, inflation is 2.6 per cent.
- > As the Board has stated previously, it will not increase the cash rate until actual inflation is sustainably within the 2 to 3 per cent target range. While inflation has picked up, it is too early to conclude that it is sustainably within the target band. There are uncertainties about how persistent the pick-up in inflation will be as supply-side problems are resolved.
- > Wages growth also remains modest and it is likely to be some time yet before aggregate wages growth is at a rate consistent with inflation being sustainably at target.
- > As previously forecast, the RBA has determined to conclude its weekly \$4b government bond buying stimulus scheme given stronger employment and inflation figures.

Other countries have already lifted their official interest rates, and others have stated they will be following suit. However, Australia is not in the same position having some leeway and a little time given the RBA did not move into negative interest rates compared to some other developed nations. Australia has had a CPI increase in the last quarter of 2021 based on increased fuel prices and construction material costs due to their shortage, but our inflation rates remain lower than other countries. So overall, the RBA Board remains patient on interest rate increases and will continue to monitor various factors affecting Australian inflation over the coming months.

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COVID-19 VACCINE BOOSTER SHOTS

The issue of COVID-19 booster doses will become more important this year as do everything we can to minimise the ongoing effects of the virus. We strongly recommend members consider their approach to COVID-19 booster shots for workers.

Booster doses are available to everyone over 18 years of age and who are fully vaccinated for at least 3 months. This timeframe has come down from 5 months fully vaccinated. Current government health advice is that a booster dose will increase the protection received from initial vaccination and reduce the negative outcomes for an individual if they catch COVID-19.

The Comirnaty (Pfizer) and Spikevax (Moderna) vaccines are approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and recommended by ATAGI as a COVID-19 booster dose. Individuals can have the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine as a booster dose regardless of which vaccine was used for the first 2 doses.

Businesses need to consider whether they will mandate, request, or just strongly encourage the benefits of undertaking a booster dose to their workers. If required members should adjust their company policies on the issue, communicate clearly with workers on the issue, and consult with them as appropriate.

NEW ZEALAND BORDERS

As part of its phased approach to opening its borders, the New Zealand Government has announced some changes to its managed isolation and quarantine system. From 27 February 2022, the changes will allow vaccinated NZ citizens and residents currently living in Australia to self-isolate and avoid formal quarantining processes. Further travellers from Australia will be able to enter New Zealand from mid-July 2022 and normal border controls will operate from October this year.

UV RADIATION

Australia has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world. Given most workers in our industry work inside it is unlikely any related issues they may experience are as a result of working in our industry. However, employers should nevertheless consider the effects of UV radiation from a workplace health and safety perspective. Rather than reinvent the wheel we provide a link to Safe Work Australia's newly released fact sheet on this issue for your review:

<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/managing-risks-solar-ultraviolet-radiation>

CONTACT

Any Industrial Relations Member who has a related query should contact Charles Watson, GM – IR, Policy and Governance at The Real Media Collective via email charles@thermc.com.au or mobile: +61 428 568 032.

DISCLAIMER

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