

# IR POLICY AND GOVERNANCE UPDATE



## INTRODUCTION

This week we look at the further drop in unemployment rates and what that means for the industry along with the current state of COVID-19 and various related updates.

## THE ECONOMY AND UNEMPLOYMENT

Given the increasing inflationary pressures, the resulting rises in interest rates, ongoing supply chain issues, and the various drops in markets, the remainder of this year looks to require careful course setting due to the bad weather hanging around the horizon. All available data does not necessarily evidence a recession, but more likely weak growth for the remainder of this year and into 2023.

In what might be seen as good news, the official unemployment rate from the Australian Bureau of Statistics has dropped again and down to 3.5%. The corollary is that job vacancies have grown to their pre-COVID levels of around 480,000. This means there will be no easy and quick solutions to finding talent in any industry sector. All sectors will need to continue working hard to attract new talent, loving the ones they're with and base their decisions on those current workplace relationships.

Attracting new talent into our industry, particularly apprentices and trainees will be an ongoing difficulty for the industry. However, with lowering housing process in major cities, offering younger generations secure work with career progression to enable them to buy into the housing market is a strong possibility for the remainder of 2022 and into next year. Conversely, and given the rising interest rates, your baby boomer and Generation X employees are more likely to remain in their current employment for the security that it provides.

The Real Media Collective is working on a number of potential solutions to assist the industry. This includes working on attempts to streamline skilled migration and a related industry labour market agreement to facilitate such an outcome. Additionally, we are working with the Smith Family to create an offer for challenged youth the opportunity to participate in industry work skills programs, particularly in regional and indigenous communities.

Additionally, we are working with the federal Minister for Education to reinstate printing apprenticeships into the priority list for funding and support. None of these will be an easy or quick fix, however we believe that with member participation they will help to overcome some of the current talent challenges facing the industry.

## COVID SETTINGS

The upswing in COVID cases across Australia and New Zealand as a result of the Omicron sub-variants is a cause for concern to the community and businesses in our industry. According to government health experts the current wave is not expected to peak until late August. Members continue to advise of the significant number of employee absences due to the ongoing infections from this ever-morphing virus.

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Over the next weeks members should revisit their workplace COVID settings and protocols and determine what appropriate measures need to be maintained, and whether previous measures need to be reconsidered. If reinstatement of previous protocols needs to occur in your workplace (such as wearing facemasks) take comfort in the knowledge that we have already been through it, and can cope with such workplace measures if we are once again required.

Remember to discuss your current settings, or those you wish to implement, with your workforce and consider any issues and concerns they have when determining your health and safety protocols and related employee directives.

The following paragraphs discuss a range of COVID related issues that may apply to your workplaces and your workforce.

## **Pandemic Leave Disaster Payment**

After last week's national cabinet meeting, the federal government has determined to reinstate this scheme until the end of September 2022. The payment scheme is funded on a 50:50 split between the Commonwealth and state and territories. From 20 July 2022, employees who are required to isolate after contracting COVID-19, and who cannot access personal leave (generally casual employees), can apply online for lump sum payment support through their MyGov account that is linked to Centrelink. The potentially available amounts are \$450 for the loss of between 8 hours work and less than 20 hours work, and \$750 for the loss of 20 hours or more of work. If you have any casual employees we recommend you pre-emptively discuss the potential availability of such government support should the need arise. Further information can be found [here](#).

## **COVID Booster shots**

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on immunisation ("ATAGI") has updated its recommendations on receiving an additional COVID-19 booster shot. All adults aged 65 or over are being recommended to receive what ATAGI are calling a 'winter booster dose' of a COVID-19 vaccine.

Adults between 50-64 years of age are being recommended to receive a winter booster dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. Adults between 30-49 years of age *can* receive a winter booster dose. Further, the interval between a recent COVID-19 infection or the first booster dose and the winter booster dose is now 3 months. The winter booster dose is expected to boost an individual's immune response to the rise of the Omicron BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants. More information on the fourth shot/winter booster dose can be found [here](#).

## **Current New Zealand settings**

Under its COVID-19 Protection Framework (Traffic Lights), New Zealand is currently set at the Orange setting. Operating guidelines for businesses at Orange require that facemasks be worn on flights, public transport, in taxis, indoor retail settings, and in public indoor settings wherever it is practical, and particularly if employees are interacting with customers. Further information on current New Zealand settings at Orange can be found [here](#).

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## **Victorian Small Business Ventilation Program**

Good ventilation in workplaces is important because COVID-19 is airborne and primarily spread between people breathing in very small droplets or aerosols containing the virus. The risk of aerosol transmission is higher in a poorly ventilated space because fine aerosol spray from an infected person can remain circulating, linger and spread more easily.

To assist small businesses, the Victorian government is opening another round of its Ventilation Program and until 8 September 2022. Eligible businesses can access between \$500 and \$5,000 in rebates or grants for air ventilation and filtration equipment, works or professional services that will improve ventilation. Further information on this program or for applications can be found [here](#).

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## **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](mailto:charles@thermc.com.au) or mobile: +61 428 568 032.

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