COVID-19 Information Sheet – Victoria (VIC)

Disclaimer: The information below should not be considered an exhaustive list and service delivery may change. Please contact organisations and services directly for the most up to date information and to enquire further about eligibility. Red Cross does not determine eligibility for the third-party services listed.

Victorian Government Updates

- The Victorian Government Coronavirus Homepage provides information on:
  - Testing sites and guidelines for what to do if you have COVID-19.
  - A list of public exposure sites in Melbourne and Victoria.
  - The wearing of masks in public, on public transport, and in crowds.
  - Travel restrictions and interstate border restrictions.

- COVID-19 vaccinations: For information on the Victorian vaccination program visit the Department of Health webpage, including in languages other than English.

- Emergency relief packages are available from the Victorian Government for vulnerable Victorians needing to self-quarantine due to coronavirus (COVID-19). An emergency relief package contains essential food and personal care items that are available to vulnerable Victorians who need to quarantine or isolation due to coronavirus (COVID-19).

- The Pandemic Leave Disaster Payment and COVID-19 Disaster Payment is available to people in Victoria on temporary visas who have a visa with work rights, and also meet with other criteria including:
  - You have coronavirus (COVID-19)
  - You have been in close contact with a person who has COVID-19
  - You care for a child, 16 years or under, who has COVID-19 or who has been in close contact with a person who has COVID-19
  - You are caring for someone who has COVID-19
  - You are unable to go to work and earn an income
  - You have no appropriate leave entitlements, including pandemic sick leave, personal leave or leave to care for another person

- Home Affairs has updated the COVID-19 and the Border / Staying in Australia webpage with more detailed information for people with temporary visas:

  - Visitor visa or Electronic Travel Authority (ETA)
  - Student and Temporary Graduate Visa
  - Temporary Skill Shortage (subclass 482) or Temporary Work (Skilled) (subclass 457)
  - Working Holiday Maker visa
  - Seasonal Worker
  - Special Category Visa
  - Bridging Visa
  - Regional Visa
  - My visa has expired

  From September 2020, concessions have been made for certain visa holders impacted by the pandemic. These concessions help if you have been disadvantaged by border closures, business restrictions or the economic downturn. If you hold, or held, a visa listed below during the COVID-19 concession period you may be eligible:

- o   [Skilled Regional (Subclass 887) visa](#)
- o   [Business Innovation and Investment (Permanent) (Subclass 888) visa](#)
- o   [Business Innovation and Investment (Provisional) (Subclass 188) visa](#)
- o   [Safe Haven Enterprise (Subclass 790) visa](#)
- o   [Temporary Graduate (Subclass 485) visa](#)

For information on the [Temporary Activity Visa (subclass 408)](#) visit the Home Affairs website.

How to stay COVID safe

- With the relaxing of restrictions, and opening of state and some international borders, Australian governments are encouraging everyone to remain COVID safe.

Physical distancing
- o   When and where possible, remain 1.5 metres away from other people.
- o   Avoid physical greetings such as handshaking, hugs, and kisses.
- o   Take extra care if you are using [public transport](#).
- o   Avoid crowds and large public gatherings.
- o   Wear a mask when in public.

Workplaces & schools
- o   Follow the recommended government [health and hygiene advice](#).
- o   Avoid non-essential face-to-face meetings.
- o   Provide alcohol-based hand rub for all staff.
- o   Eat lunch at your desk or outside rather than in the lunchroom.
- o   Regularly clean and disinfect surfaces that many people touch.
- o   Open windows or adjust air conditioning for more ventilation.
- o   Stay at home if you are feeling unwell.

Employment & Work Rights

- From 01 May 2021, if you relocate to take up ongoing work, including an apprenticeship, for more than 20 hours a week for more than six months, you may be eligible to receive up to:

- o $3,000 if you relocate to a capital city*
- o $6,000 if you relocate to a regional area
- o   An extra $3,000 if you relocate with a dependent.

For more information on Relocation Assistance, visit the Australian Government's Department of Education, Skills & Employment [website here](#).

- **Temporary relaxation of working hours for student visa holders**

Due to exceptional circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to ensure the supply of critical services, the [Department of Home Affairs and Australian Border Force](#) will take a flexible approach to student visa holders working beyond their usual work limitations, but only in specified industries.

You can work more than 40 hours a fortnight if you are:

- o working for an aged care Approved Provider or Commonwealth-funded aged care service provider with a RACS ID or a NAPS ID (including if you are engaged by a labour hire company or recruitment agency)
- o working for a registered National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provider (including if you are engaged by a labour hire company or recruitment agency)
- o enrolled in a health care related course and you are supporting the health effort against COVID-19, as directed by health officials
- o working in the agriculture sector
- o working in the tourism and hospitality sector
- o working in a supermarket, or associated distribution facility, located in an area impacted by COVID-19 lockdown restrictions for the duration of the lockdown.

All workers in Australia have the same rights and protections at work, regardless of citizenship or visa status. Your employer must comply with Australian workplace and immigration laws, including their obligation to:

- Pay you the right pay rate for all time worked
- Provide a safe workplace.
- For information on working in Australia visit the Home Affairs website.

The Fair Work Ombudsman provides education, assistance, advice and guidance to employers and employees, and can inquire into and investigate breaches of the Fair Work Act.

The Migrant Workers Centre empowers migrant workers in Victoria to understand rights, enforce them in workplaces, and connect with other migrant workers. The website has information in a number of languages, including Tagalog, Malay, Arabic, Mandarin, Spanish and Tamil.

Food and/or Emergency Relief

- The Victorian government's International Student Emergency Relief Fund **closed in December 2020**. International students in Victoria who continue to experience financial hardship are encouraged to apply via Red Cross for the Extreme Hardship Support Program.

- AskIzzy is a national database with links to supports including housing, food and clothing, health services, financial support, family violence assistance, and much more.

- The National Debt Helpline provides free financial advice, and the NDH website has information on topics such as rent, utilities and emergency financial assistance. The NDH is open Monday to Friday from 9:30am – 4:30pm, on 1800 007 007.

- The DSS Grants Service Directory is a searchable database of service providers offering emergency relief (including food support). Visit the Victoria section of the directory.

- The City of Melbourne Community Food Guide is a resource for community agencies or anyone in the community who needs affordable, fresh and healthy food.

- Empower Australia have food relief locations in Southbank, Lower Plenty, Ringwood, Pakenham, and Grovedale. Visit the website for more information or phone (03) 9896 7999.

- Moreland City Council includes a list of emergency relief, foodbanks, food pantries and services offering food parcels in the Council area here.

- Health Direct also maintains a database where you can search for food relief. Select food relief as the service you are looking for and enter in your location or suburb to see what services might be available near you.

- CISVic local services assist people experiencing personal and financial difficulties by providing information, referral and support services including Emergency Relief.

Rent and Utilities

- The Victorian government's rental moratorium ended in **March 2021** and new rental laws are now in effect. To read about these laws, visit the Victorian Consumer Affairs website.

- The Tenants Victoria website is updated regularly, with information for people renting in Victoria. Ph: 9416 2577 (please note, a wait time of approximately 30 mins is expected).

- The Justice Connect website is provides housing and rental support information.

- Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria
  - In Victoria, all energy and water companies must have a hardship program to assist people who are struggling to pay their bills. There are various areas that energy and water companies can help with, including:
    - An affordable payment plan to help break bills into smaller payments.
    - Energy and water efficiency information to help lower usage.
    - Assistance with applying for the Victorian Government's Utility Relief Grant Scheme (URGS) which provides up to $500 each for electricity, gas and water (subject to eligibility criteria). *If you are not a concession card holder, you need to contact your retailer to find out if you are eligible.*
  - Putting you on a cheaper energy plan.
  - Ensuring concessions are applied to your account.
  - Referral to support services including financial counselling.
  - General Information factsheets in languages other than English.

Housing / Homelessness

- The Victorian government's rental moratorium ended in **March 2021** and new rental laws are now in effect. To read about these laws, visit the Victorian Consumer Affairs website.
- From Monday 29 March 2021:

  - Rent reduction agreements can no longer be lodged with Consumer Affairs Victoria
  - You can apply directly to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) for dispute resolution
  - Applications for the rent relief grant have closed
  - Rental providers (landlords) can issue a notice to vacate to renters (tenants) and raise the rent again, but new rights and responsibilities apply

- Victoria DHHS Crisis Accommodation Line: A 24/7 statewide toll free number – 1800 825 955 for housing support. The number will direct your call to a service closest to you, or if the call is outside business hours, it will be redirected to Salvation Army Crisis Services.

- Launch Housing: Bob's Place, 35 Robinson Street, Dandenong, phone: 03 9792 0750

- WAYSS: WAYSS Women's Integrated Services assists women and women with children, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness due to family violence, with information, advocacy, referral and support. Located at 20 Princess Hwy, Dandenong, phone (03) 9791 6111.

Health and Medical Care

- **Coronavirus Hotline:** 1800 675 398 – open 24 hours, 7 days.

- What if I am from overseas and not eligible for Medicare? Overseas travellers who fall ill in Australia (and are not eligible for Medicare) often have health or travel insurance. For those who do not have adequate insurance coverage, **Victorian hospitals will waive the costs of treatment**. This includes waiving payment and debt recovery procedures for ambulance transfers of people suspected to have coronavirus (COVID-19), who are taken to Victorian hospitals for assessment.

- Monash Health Refugee Health and Wellbeing
  See website for specific locations and contacts, main line 03 9594 6666

- All people seeking asylum are entitled to free medical care in Victorian hospitals. For more information visit the Royal Children's Hospital (RCH Melbourne) website.

- Neami 'Partners in Wellbeing' – for support or referrals call 1300 375 330 and for more information on the program visit the Neami website.

- The Refugee Health Guide includes Refugee Health Programs staffed by refugee nurses, doctors and other specialists that operate nationally - providing specialised mental and primary health care and service coordination to refugees and people seeking asylum. Information on referral pathways in Victoria are found here.

- Reciprocal Health Care Agreements: Agreements with 11 countries that cover the cost of medically necessary care when Australians visit certain countries and visitors from these countries visit Australia. Those visiting Australia from the following countries may be eligible for medical care under Medicare while in Australia, information for each country is available here.

- Temporary Visa Categories Covered by Ministerial Orders (eligible for Medicare)

Information for the LGBTQI+ community

- Information on health and counselling services, social groups, legal support, multicultural specific services, and other services are found on this national LGBTQI+ directory.

- **Uniting Care** runs the peer support program QRAC. Contact Ian (0400 121 907), Jayke (0448 440 991) or Andi (0409 091 734) for more information.

Information for International Students in VIC

- The Victorian Government's International Student Emergency Relief Fund closed on 31 December 2020. The Study Melbourne website provides information on other supports available to international students living in Victoria.

- International students hotline (1300 981 621) / international.students@dese.gov.au

- **Australian Catholic University** has closed all financial support. Check their website for updates and other general COVID-19 information.

- **Deakin University** has closed its financial support scheme. General information for students is available on their website.

- **La Trobe University** has information on COVID-19 including student support, and a COVID Safety Plan PDF available for download.

- **University of Melbourne** has financial aid and food support available to eligible students. More information is available on their website.

- **Monash University** has a number of factsheets available on their website, as well as information on returning to campus, library opening hours, and government updates.

- **Swinburne University of Technology** has created a page on its website to support students and staff to access official information and updates from the university.

- **Victoria University** has restricted campus access. For the latest updates, and other information for students visit the Victoria University website.

Information for New Zealanders living in Australia

New Zealand citizens in Australia on a Special Category Visa (SCV) may be able to access a range of payments, depending on their circumstances.

- Those who came to Australia prior to 26 February 2001 generally have protected status and have the same access to all Australian payments as permanent residents and Australian citizens, where eligible, including JobSeeker Payment.

- New Zealanders who came to Australia after 26 February 2001 and have non-protected status can access family payments, such as FTB, paid parental leave payments and childcare subsidy, where eligible. If they have been continuously living in Australia for at least 10 years since February 2001, they can also access JobSeeker Payment or Youth Allowance for a one-off period of up to six months.

- New Zealanders on an SCV may be eligible for the JobKeeper Payment if they meet the qualifying criteria, https://treasury.gov.au/coronavirus/jobkeeper.

- New Zealand citizens may also be able to claim the Age Pension or, in limited circumstances, Disability Support Pension or Carer Payment, under the Social Security Agreement between Australia and New Zealand.

- For further general information:
  https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/subjects/payments-visa-holders

- Individuals needing specific advice on their circumstances should contact Services Australia:
  https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/contact-us

Additional Information for People Seeking Asylum and Refugees

- CatholicCare have developed an online resource of financial, health, housing and other emergency relief services available for people seeking asylum. You can access the link here.

- If you have a Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) or Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV), you are eligible to apply for the Special Benefit payment through Centrelink. You will need to meet the other criteria for the payment. Click the link for more information.

- Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS)

  o The SRSS program supports vulnerable migrants who are waiting for the government's decision on a visa application, including people seeking asylum. It provides temporary needs-based support for people facing significant barriers and unable to support themselves while resolving their immigration status.
  o In Victoria, the SRSS Program is delivered by:
    - Life Without Barriers. Contact: info@lwb.org.au Dandenong (03 8752 8500) / Epping (03 8405 4400) / Sunshine (03 9313 2400)
    - Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES) - If you or someone you know would like to apply for SRSS with AMES Australia, contact online or call 13 AMES (13 2637) for more information.

- Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP)

  o The HSP is a national program funded by the Australian Government to help refugees to establish themselves when they first arrive in Australia.
  o People granted the following visas are eligible to access the HSP on arrival:
    - Refugee (subclass 200, 201, 203 and 204) visa
    - Global Special Humanitarian (subclass 202) visa
  o Other visa holders are also eligible to access the HSP, but only to receive Specialised and Intensive Services (SIS). These include:
    - Refugee (subclass 200, 201, 203 and 204)
    - Global Special Humanitarian (subclass 202)
    - Protection (subclass 866)
    - Temporary Protection (subclass 785), Temporary Humanitarian Stay (subclass 449), Temporary Humanitarian Concern (subclass 786) and Safe Haven Enterprise (subclass 790).
  o SIS is a component of the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) available to humanitarian entrants and other eligible visa holders who have complex needs:
  o HSP Service Provider Locations