



Stat Report 2020/11

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COVID-19: Rapid responses and the challenges of rapid change

In responding to the COVID-19 pandemic Health Services are having to scramble to make adjustments in how they operate to ensure safe and healthy workplaces, while also ensuring they have a workforce large enough to accommodate surge workloads. This includes changes to how people work together and increasingly impacting on shift times and rosters, as well as the growing likelihood that for some members they will be asked to redeploy to work in other areas.

Your Union, along with all other health Unions, is committed to cooperate with health services to put in place urgent changes necessary to aid public hospitals cope with maintaining acute care services for coronavirus patients. We insist however that your rights and entitlements are not compromised and that we reserve our right to take actions against any health service that abuses the good will we have offered.

It is not possible to deal with the scope and range of potential changes in advance of change proposals. Instead, we will apply the following broad principles with respect to consultation and changes: we must be notified of any change that impacts on members, and an outline of the proposed change explaining impacts on you will be provided to us. Any concerns that we raise on behalf of members will be quickly and genuinely responded to by health services.

Further, health services provide written guarantees that a change is temporary and only for the purposes of COVID-19 response. The same principle applies for any reduction in hours, where a reduction is agreed.

We appreciate that in a rapidly changing environment and pressure to contain the pandemic that it might not always be possible to provide the same level of consultation we would ordinarily demand.

We have advised the DHHS and health services that we will not tolerate proposed changes that are opportunistic. Any proposed change that is not COVID-19 related, or where the COVID-19 response is being used opportunistically to achieve a change that we have rejected in the past, will be rejected and we will take appropriate action against any health service attempting to force through such a change.

It is clear that health services are likely to ask members that work in non-essential services to redeploy into other services where they need to maintain a workforce or build a surge workforce. We are very conscious this scenario will likely create anxiety and uncertainty for you, and stress the need to get advice from us if you have any doubts or fears.

For some members in private health there are going to be instances where employers are going to stand down staff during the pandemic. We are dealing with the first instances of these in IVF and private pathology companies. As mentioned in the last STAT Report, it is very difficult to successfully argue against stand downs given the pandemic and the State of Emergency being in place.

It is again very important that we are advised of any stand down so we can advise members and engage immediately with each employer. Of course, the Federal Government's announcements this week in relation to JobKeeper payments mean that this payment should be a first option.

Members will have heard about the stimulus package that provides assistance to employers to keep staff employed. The Union welcomes the package, which unions and workers campaigned hard for, and expects that employers will apply for the JobKeepers assistance package. We believe the package will give many employers the financial relief they need to keep their services running or ensure they are able to continuing paying your wages. As with any government package there are a number of outstanding issues that remain to be clarified and are being followed up.

We have reached agreement with two employers that are about to stand down parts of their workforce that these employees can accept alternative employment in Health Services to become part of a 'surge' workforce. If you are interested in this option you can register online (see link below) for the Victorian Government's surge health workforce.

You might have also seen our continuing advocacy to ensure there is adequate testing for all Victorians in reporting by the ABC about [delays in turn-around-times for COVID-19 tests for regional and rural Victorians](#). We remain concerned that the coronavirus response has highlighted a health system that has dangerously fragmented public pathology services and is delivering pathology testing at two very different levels: coronavirus test turnaround time in regional Victoria is at least two days compared to 4 – 8 hours in a public pathology service in Melbourne. We make no apology for calling this structural discrepancy out and will continue publicly criticise private pathology providers putting commercial interests ahead of their public health obligations.

We will not shy away from ensuring your rights at work are not being trampled and we remain steadfast in protecting your rights. That's why the Union is actively working with the Government and Health Services to help best respond to the pandemic and assist with containing it. It's in all our best interests to be working together right now. We will not be unreasonable but we will not take a backward step from advocating and representing your best interests, especially in an environment of very high pressure, fear and anxiety.

During this time, we will need your help to keep track of the changes that are occurring in your workplaces. If there are changes happening please let the Union know as soon as possible so that we can follow it up with the Health Service.

Union working remotely

Our staff are working remotely and are doing most of the things we do normally, including conducting meetings through face-face meetings when needed, telephone and video conferencing, and of course phone and email contact.

As the office is unstaffed there is no-one monitoring messages left on the answering machine. **If you have called the office since our staff started working remotely from 24 March, please email us so we can provide you with assistance.**

If you require assistance please send an email to enquiry@msav.org.au - it is constantly monitored by our staff. More contact details are [available on our website](#). You can also find a range of [information on our remote advice page](#).

On behalf of all the Union's staff I want to thank you for your on-going service to Victorians and we recognise, and can't thank you enough for, the risk you are taking to ensure people are getting the care they need in a rapidly changing and highly pressurised workplace environment.

Paul Elliott
Secretary



Membership Issues

Non-Members

We continue to receive a large volume of contacts from non-Union members who work in workplaces across our coverage desperate for advice. We can give advice immediately over the phone if they join.

In the spirit of supporting health workers through this unprecedented time we hope you might have a quiet word to colleagues who are not members, and suggest that there has never been a more important time to join a Union. Let them know that it is as simple as going to our website and [clicking on the 'JOIN' link](#).

As you can imagine with an increase in contacts and working remotely means we may not be as quick to responding as normal to all membership related enquiries; however, we ask for your patience as we will respond to your enquiries.

Members

If you are in the unfortunate position of being stood down or forced on to unpaid leave, [contact us to move your membership payments to a non-working' subscription rate of \\$8.26 per month](#).

Union Round Up

COVID-19 Advice

Being told to get a medical certificate:

Members have been reporting that they are being asked to provide medical certificates to prove they don't have COVID-19. There is no industrial, medical or logical basis for your employer to make this demand; and they cannot direct you to have a consultation with your, or the employers', health practitioner.

If you are asked to get a medical certificate to prove you are free of COVID-19 please contact the Union as soon as possible on 9623 9623 or at enquiry@msav.org.au

Here's the Union's advice for members at St John of God:

SJoG is providing 'special paid sick leave' in the event a worker is required to undergo a period of self-isolation in accordance with Australian Government Department of Health's guidelines. This paid leave is in addition to workers' existing paid personal (sick/carers) leave entitlements. And, if a worker is required to self-isolate following travel, SJoG will also provide special paid sick leave. However, SJoG is encouraging workers have regard to the Governments travel advisories. If a worker subsequently becomes unwell and is declared unfit for duty, this special paid leave will cease and workers will be able to access their existing leave entitlements.

Regardless of whether you work in the public, community or private health sectors, should you find yourself having to be isolated whether at the direction of your employer or due to contact outside of the workplace, please contact the Union as quickly as possible on 9623 9623 or at enquiry@msav.org.au

Workplace Health and Safety:

It is first and foremost the responsibility of your health service to provide you with a safe and healthy workplace, which includes:

- properly and responsibly staffing to appropriate levels
- managing workloads when service demands surge
- providing personal protective equipment

- enforcing social distancing requirements

It is also your employer's responsibility to provide you with information about how your health service is responding and how they are going to keep your workplace safe and healthy.

ACL stand down

The Union has been notified by Australian Clinical Labs that it is giving members an option to take accrued leave and will use standing down due to what management is reporting as being a significant downturn in business.

Members have been sent an email outlining the Union's initial response with a teleconference organised to discuss the situation with ACL members. There are a number of details the Union is still unclear about and are working through them.

ACL has advised that is looking to sign up to the Jobkeeper scheme, so there is likely to be changes to the circumstances first discussed.

Queries should be directed to enquiries@msav.org.au

Dorevitch Pathology

Dorevitch has moved to get as many workers as possible to take annual leave. Whilst we won't attempt to stand in the way of any member who opts for leave we recommend getting advice before making a decision, particularly given the announcement on JobKeeper payments.

IVF

The Union has been receiving lots of questions from members in IVF practices regarding stand downs, and loss of entitlements if IVF businesses fail among a range of other questions given the current situation.

In the worst-case scenario, the federal government has a 'fair entitlements guarantee' which will pay out, as a last resort, unpaid annual and long service leave and redundancy pay if relevant.

There is a cap on weekly salary of \$2451 as at August 2019 – see [here](#). Note that superannuation payments are not covered. The Union is not sure what the implications are for your Workcover entitlements if your hours of work are reduced to a member on Workcover.

General Pathology Tests

If you are required to get a test done as part of a consultation with your health practitioner, you are not required to go to the pathology laboratory suggested by your health practitioner. You can go to any pathology laboratory collection centre with your referral and still have the test(s) done and the results sent to your health practitioner.

Surge Workforce Registration

Members who have found themselves being stood down or required to take leave for the COVID-19 pandemic can register for the surge workforce being prepared by the Government.

To register visit: <https://healthworkforceresponse.dhhs.vic.gov.au>

Australian Unions Member Benefits

The latest Member Benefits update is out and it has some great things included, a guide to shopping online and avoiding potential harm as the world works from home.

[Check out the latest news and offers here](#)

Psychologists: If you need help at work you need the VPA Inc.

If you are a psychologist and not in the VPA, you are taking unnecessary risks with your reputation and career. [Download an application form and join today.](#)

Common beaches of employment entitlements and negotiation of enterprise agreements

The VPA routinely assists members over issues such as harassment and bullying, under classification, organisational re-structuring, incorrect calculation of leave entitlements and health and safety. In addition, it negotiates enterprise agreements for psychologists in the public and private sectors to ensure that rates of pay and conditions remain up to date.

Support the Healthy Futures campaign



The Union strongly believes that climate change is union business. We know that climate change threatens our health by increasing the risks of heatwaves, bushfires, droughts and storms, displacing people and straining our health systems.

And right now HESTA and First State Super (FSS), Australia's biggest health industry super funds, are investing our money in fossil fuels - coal, oil and gas.

Join us in asking HESTA and FSS to divest from fossil fuels at www.healthyfutures.net.au/divest.

Stopping Gendered Violence at Work

Far too often women are attacked, harassed and threatened in their workplaces. And it needs to stop. That's why the Union is fighting back against gendered violence in the workplace – it's a very serious occupational health and safety issue.

Gendered violence is like a disease in our workplaces. Working women's experience of violence at work indicates that the problem of gendered violence is endemic in our workplaces.

Sign up to support the campaign at: <http://www.unionwomen.org.au/stopgv>

Do you need access to Domestic Violence services?

If you're experiencing domestic violence and need help, here is a list of Victorian services which may be able to assist you.

[Safe Steps \(formerly Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service of Victoria\)](#)

[Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria \(FVPLS\)](#)

[Centre Against Sexual Assault \(CASA\) Forum](#)

[Community Legal Centres](#)

[Court Network](#)

[Domestic Violence Victoria](#)

[Elder Rights Advocacy \(ERA\)](#)

[Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women's Service](#)

[inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence](#)

[Men's Referral Service](#)

[No To Violence](#)

[QLife Australia](#)

[Seniors Rights Victoria \(SRV\)](#)

[The Jewish Taskforce Against Family Violence](#)

[Victoria Legal Aid \(VLA\)](#)

[Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency](#)

[Women with Disabilities Victoria \(WDV\)](#)

[Women's Housing Ltd](#)

[Women's Information Referral Exchange \(WIRE\)](#)

[Women's Legal Service](#)

[Women's refuges](#)

Worth Reading: Coronavirus: it's tempting to drink your worries away but there are healthier ways to manage stress and keep your drinking in check

"Bottle shops remain on the [list of essential services](#) allowed to stay open and Australians are [stocking up on alcohol](#)."

In these difficult times, it's not surprising some people are looking to alcohol for a little stress reduction. But there are healthier ways of coping with the challenges we currently face."

Read the entire article by Nicole Lee, Genevieve Dingle and Sonja Pohlman in The Conversation at: <https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-its-tempting-to-drink-your-worries-away-but-there-are-healthier-ways-to-manage-stress-and-keep-your-drinking-in-check-134669>

Worth Reading: A major scorecard gives the health of Australia's environment less than 1 out of 10

"2019 was the year Australians confronted the fact that a healthy environment is more than just a pretty waterfall in a national park; a nice extra we can do without. We do not survive without air to breathe, water to drink, soil to grow food and weather we can cope with.

Every year, we collate a vast number of measurements on the state of our environment: weather, oceans, fire, water, soils, vegetation, population pressure, and biodiversity. The data is collected in many different ways: by satellites, field stations, surveys and so on.

We process this data into several indicators of environmental health at both national and regional levels."

Read the entire article by Albert Van Dijk, Luigi Renzullo, Marta Yebra and Shoshana Rapley in The Conversation at: <https://theconversation.com/a-major-scorecard-gives-the-health-of-australias-environment-less-than-1-out-of-10-133444>

Worth Reading: The wash-up on coronavirus and food

"On our virtual sofa, we spoke with resident expert and senior food microbiology consultant, Cathy Moir. Here's what she had to say on all things food and coronavirus. Grab a cuppa and settle in.

We research foodborne microorganisms. This ensures Australians continue to feel confident the foods we buy are safe to eat. We have a key role in food safety research globally. And we provide advice for Australian consumers and industry. At this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, we know messages can be confusing. So here is some advice about the risks of respiratory coronavirus and food in your home."

Read the entire article by Cathy Moir in the CSIRO Blog at: <https://blog.csiro.au/coronavirus-and-food/>

Join the Union

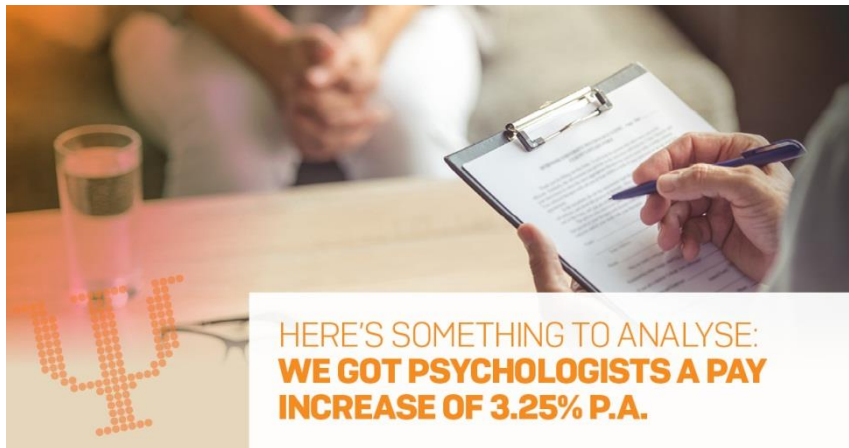
Are your workloads increasing? Are your stress levels increasing? Join the Union today!

To protect our professions we must strengthen our collective voice by increasing our membership. You can help by sharing one of the images below on Facebook.



WE DIAGNOSE AN **INCREASE
IN PAY OF 3.25% PER YEAR
OVER 4 YEARS.**

[Share on Facebook](#)



HERE'S SOMETHING TO ANALYSE:
**WE GOT PSYCHOLOGISTS A PAY
INCREASE OF 3.25% P.A.**

[Share on Facebook](#)



WE WON PHARMACISTS AN EASY
TO SWALLOW **3.25% PER YEAR
PAY INCREASE.**

[Share on Facebook](#)

Your Union is on Facebook

Keep up to date with what's happening by liking us on Facebook

[Medical Scientists Association of Victoria](#) | [Victorian Psychologists Association Inc](#) | [Association of Hospital Pharmacists](#)

Australian Unions Member

Benefits app

As a Union member you get access to exclusive Member Benefits. The program has expanded to include:

- Discounted movie tickets for Village, Hoyts, Palace and Event cinemas.
- Discounted electronic gift cards including major theme parks, zoos and aquariums.
- A discounted accommodation booking site.
- A new secure member only website and smart phone app.

All this is free to all members of affiliated unions – that means you! If you have not got a login and would like join in [register for Member Benefits now.](#)



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Is there a copy of STAT Report on your Union noticeboard or in your staff room?

If not print out a copy and leave it on the noticeboard or in the staff room for your colleagues.