



Dear Chief Executive Officer

COVID-19 - Mutual Obligation Arrangements

The Australian Government has suspended mutual obligation requirements for job seekers and participants in regions across Australia affected by COVID-19 lockdowns. The below outlines the mutual obligation requirement arrangements the Australian Government has put in place to support job seekers and participants in affected States and Territories during this time. This includes the temporary suspension of mutual obligation requirements:

- in **Western Australia** for the Perth Region and Peel Region is in place from Tuesday 29 June until Tuesday 6 July 2021 inclusive.
- in the **Northern Territory** for job seekers and participants in the City of Darwin and the City of Palmerston is in place, applying from Monday 28 June until Tuesday 6 July 2021 inclusive.
- in **New South Wales** for job seekers and participants in the Local Government Areas of Greater Sydney, Blue Mountains, Central Coast, Wollongong, and Shellharbour is in place, applying from Sunday 27 June 2021 until Tuesday 13 July 2021 inclusive.
- in **New South Wales** for job seekers and participants in the Local Government Areas of City of Sydney, Waverley, Randwick, Canada Bay, Inner West, Bayside and Woollahra is in place, applying from Friday 25 June 2021 until Tuesday 13 July 2021 inclusive.

Please note, the Australian Government will also temporarily suspend mutual obligation requirements for job seekers and participants in **Queensland** Local Government Areas of Townsville, Brisbane, Gold Coast, Ipswich, Lockyer Valley, Logan, Moreton Bay, Noosa, Redland, Scenic Rim, Somerset and Sunshine Coast, from Wednesday 30 June until Tuesday 6 July 2021 inclusive.

The above arrangements apply to job seekers and participants with mutual obligation requirements across employment services programs - jobactive, Online Employment Services, Disability Employment Services and ParentsNext.

These arrangements mean all mutual obligation requirements have been lifted — no compliance action will be taken and no one's payments will be suspended. Job seekers and participants will not be penalised for not meeting their mutual obligation requirements, such as signing their Job Plan, attending, or reporting their attendance at appointments or activities.

Job seekers whose Job Search Periods end during the lifting of mutual obligation requirements will not be required to complete their Job Search requirement.

The Department will send an SMS directly to all impacted job seekers and participants advising them of this temporary suspension.

Special Circumstances Exemptions also continue to be available through Services Australia for job seekers who require them.

Servicing

I expect that you will continue to ensure job seekers and participants are supported to access the full range of assistance available - including mental health services, if required. Your job seekers and participants should also be encouraged to continue to check their mutual obligation requirements including when they are due/or scheduled, after the suspension of mutual obligation requirements ends. This includes Job Search requirements.

Please ensure that services are delivered by your organisation safely, and in line with all local health advice for that area. Job seekers and participants whose mutual obligations have been suspended can continue to voluntarily participate in non-face-to-face provider appointments delivered in line with local health advice. I encourage your organisation to revisit your existing COVID-19 safe plan to ensure participants' and your staff members' safety.

Your organisation should consider the stay at home orders and movement restrictions in place when deciding Acceptable and Valid Reasons for all job seekers and participants.

Providers must only operate face-to-face servicing where it is permissible by relevant state or territory governments. As restrictions differ across Australia, providers should be aware what restrictions apply to their service sites and act accordingly.

That is, where face to face delivery is restricted by the requirements of a relevant State or Territory government, your organisation must provide face-to-face servicing up to the limit of the relevant restriction until the restriction is revoked, and provide services remotely by phone, video or online where face-to-face services cannot otherwise be delivered.

As previously advised, the Department will take a "no disadvantage approach" in relation to assessing provider performance in the relevant reporting period. This means that wherever mutual obligation requirements for job seekers are suspended, the Department will take this into consideration when assessing performance.

The Department also continues to monitor developments across the rest of Australia, considering advice from State and Territory Governments and the evolving nature of the situation.

I urge you and your staff to continue to follow the guidance of health officials and stay safe during this challenging time.

If you have any questions, please contact your Account Manager.

Yours sincerely



Nathan Smyth
29 June 2021

Date: 30/6/2021

Suspension of Mutual Obligation Requirements for Job Seekers and Participants in Western Australia and the Northern Territory affected by COVID-19 lockdowns

Mutual obligation requirements for **Western Australian** job seekers and participants are suspended from **today, Tuesday 29 June to Tuesday 6 July 2021 (inclusive) in the Perth Region and Peel Region.**

Mutual obligation requirements for **Northern Territory** job seekers and participants in the Local Government Areas of the City of Darwin and **the City of Palmerston are suspended from yesterday, Monday 28 June to Tuesday 6 July 2021 (inclusive).**

This arrangement applies over this period for jobactive, Online Employment Services, ParentsNext and Disability Employment Services.

This means that job seekers and participants residing in these areas will not be subject to compliance action or payment suspensions but should continue to check when their requirements are due or scheduled to occur after the suspension of mutual obligation requirements ends. This includes Job Search Requirements. This will apply to both job seekers and participants with a residential address in the area or managed by a provider site located in the areas.

Where job seekers and participants can, and it is safe to do so in line with health advice, they can engage with their employment service provider. Please ensure the services you deliver are safe and in line with all local health advice for that area. Job seekers and participants can continue to voluntarily participate in non face-to-face provider appointments delivered in line with local health advice.

Special circumstances exemptions will continue to be available from Services Australia for job seekers and participants who require them, including for people directly impacted by COVID-19.

If you have questions or concerns about the current arrangements, please speak to your Account or Contract Manager.

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