



**The Hon. Scott Morrison MP**  
Prime Minister

**TRANSCRIPT**  
**PRESS CONFERENCE**  
**AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENT HOUSE, ACT**  
**SUNDAY 29 MARCH 2020**

EO&E...

**PRIME MINISTER:** Good evening, everyone. It's been a hard week in Australia. I said earlier this week when the Parliament met that 2020 was going to be one of the most difficult in the lives of all Australians and this week has demonstrated that. A tough week. Hundreds of thousands of people have left the labour force, left the workforce, thousands upon thousands of businesses have had to shut their doors. Sixteen people in total now have lost their lives, including two today. This is a very difficult time. It is also true, though, as the National Cabinet has met tonight, the National Cabinet that brings together all the premiers and chief ministers of all the states and territories, the heads of all of our Australian governments, together with myself, to make the decisions that are needed to save lives and to save livelihoods and we've gathered together again this evening to do just that.

Earlier today, I reminded you in our earlier media conference that the rate of increase has been falling. Towards this time last week, the rate of daily increase was up around 25 to 30 per cent. Today's rate of increase it actually has fallen to 9 per cent. But there are no guarantees about how that goes forward. We need to continue to do the things that we've committed ourselves to do to save lives and save livelihoods and I want to thank Australians for their strong support and growing support for the measures that are necessary to do just that.

Earlier today, I noted that we are working and we'll be working again through the night this evening to pull together the next tranche in our economic supports that they can be there to support Australians in jobs and to keep them in jobs and to keep them connected to the companies that will be there on the other side so they can stand up again and ensure that Australia bounces back strongly, so we can return to life as we knew it at some point in the future once we get to the other side of the virus. I also outlined today, announced today, over a billion dollars in additional support on top of the \$3 billion we've already committed to the arrangements for health around the country. So from tomorrow, telehealth, that means you can get a consultation over the phone with your doctor. That starts tomorrow, the Health Minister announced that and went through the details today. Some \$200 million in emergency relief going to important not for profit and charitable sector organisations like Foodbank and many others that are going to be helping people in great need as this economic crisis hits and hits hard. \$150 million to support domestic violence. That includes the work of 1800 Respect and MensLine, as we're very aware of the greater stresses that are going on Australian families and households and that for most, we hope, home where people will be for a lot of time this year. It'll be a safe place, but for many we know it's not and we need to work to counter that threat to those individuals as well. And \$74 million dollars to support mental

health and we're all going to need that help in the months ahead and that's to support organisations like Lifeline and Kids Help Line and many others.

Earlier throughout the day, some 1,600 people went into quarantine as a result of the decisions taken by the National Cabinet on Friday and I particularly want to congratulate New South Wales, who have done all the heavy lifting on that today, working together with the Australian Border Force and the Australian Defence Forces. That was an extraordinary effort to put that in place from midnight last night and I congratulate Premier Berejiklian and everyone who has been involved, Commissioner Mick Fuller, the whole team in New South Wales working so well with us today to ensure we can put those arrangements in place. And to those who may be even watching this now from inside those hotels where you are self isolating, I know this is a terrible inconvenience for you but it is necessary to save lives. And we thank you for your cooperation this evening.

New technology we've put in place today is going to help us as a country get the messages and information we need to do the right thing to save lives and save livelihoods. The WhatsApp message service I referred to earlier today has now had 291,000 people go onto that arrangement and you can get on there by entering into your internet browser [aus.gov.au/WhatsApp](https://aus.gov.au/WhatsApp). Some 1.25 million messages have been sent over the course of today. The coronavirus app, which I mentioned earlier today, is up on the app platform and for the Apple app platform and Android and a new registration feature is now in place on that app. There have been some 482,000 downloads on the coronavirus app today and I want to encourage every Australian - you've got a phone, you need the app. Go on there and make sure you download that app and go on the internet browser and get access to that WhatsApp service so you can get the messages you need to support your decisions for you and your family. That coronavirus app also has that new registration feature about self-isolation, that helps us get information to you and supports the work that we're doing in managing the virus and I'd encourage you to look at that this evening and register, if you please could, and I'm asking media to support us by publicising both the coronavirus app and the WhatsApp message service.

Tonight, the National Cabinet met to consider a series of issues and they related principally firstly to the issue of public gatherings. Now, you'll be aware of the arrangements that are already in place, that gatherings are currently restricted to 10 persons, except for members of your household. And for the purposes of employment and education, we should also comply with the requirements for working and learning from home and social distancing principles. So up until now, that has been a restriction of 10 people in a gathering in an outdoor area or in a shopping centre or anything like this. The advice now is that, and I should stress that that 10 person limit that is enforceable now in most states and territories and can carry very significant on the spot fines.

That advice has now been strengthened to say that it should be reduced to two persons in public spaces and other areas of gathering. States and territories will determine whether they proceed to make this an enforceable limit in the same way that the 10 person limit is already being enforced, but agreed that in all cases this is the strong advice of all states and territories, that unless it's your household, the family, those who are living at your residence, that being with only one other person as a gathering outside is what is required. That provides, importantly, for those who may be getting daily exercise, particularly for women, that they wouldn't be required to walk on their own and they'd be able to walk with another person.

In addition, in public areas, public playgrounds, outside gyms and skate parks will be closed as from tomorrow. And bootcamps, obviously, will be reduced to two, which doesn't really make it a bootcamp, that makes it a private session with your trainer for those who are accessing those services. For individuals, the strong advice that we are endorsing again today as a National Cabinet, and this follows the advice we have been providing but we felt it was essential to reinforce this tonight. This is the public health advice.

You must stay at home except for the following reasons: A, shopping for what you need, food and other essential supplies that enable you to remain at home and to do that shopping as infrequently as possible. B, for medical care or compassionate needs. C, to exercise in compliance with the public gathering rules that I've already outlined. And D, for work and education if you cannot work or learn remotely.

Also, we are going further this evening on the basis of the advice that there is strong advice - this is not a compulsion, this is strong advice - that people aged 70 and over should stay at home and self isolate for their own protection to the maximum extent practicable. They are not self isolating for the purpose that people can that our health advice is that they consider they carry or are carriers, but this is for their own protection to limit their interaction with others in the community. This does not mean that they cannot go outside. They can go outside and be accompanied by a support person for the purposes of getting some fresh air, some recreation. But they should limit contact with others as much as possible. These arrangements should also apply to those with chronic illness over 60 and Indigenous persons over the age of 50.

Now, the National Cabinet also considered this evening issues relating to commercial tenancies as well as residential tenancies and they agreed to a series of principles which are released through the statement. But the most significant of those is that states and territories will be moving to put a moratorium on evictions of persons as a result of financial distress if they are unable to meet their commitments. And so there will be a moratorium on evictions for the next six months under those rental arrangements. Now, there is a lot more work to be done here and my message to tenants, particularly commercial tenants and commercial landlords, is a very straightforward one. We need you to sit down, talk to each other and work this out about looking at the businesses which have been closed, businesses that may have had a significant reduction in their revenues and we need landlords and tenants to sit down and come up with arrangements that enable them to get through this crisis so on the other side, the landlord has a tenant, which is a business that can pay rent and the business is a business that can re-emerge on the other side of this and be able to go on and employ people on the other side of these arrangements. And we want the banks to help them achieve this outcome. We want people to sit down and work this out. We will be working on measures that will be encouraging you to do just that and to support you to do just that, but also to ensure that if you aren't going to engage in that sort of cooperative activity between banks, between tenants and between landlords, then the sort of support that you might otherwise expect to receive, you will not receive. This is part of the hibernation approach where we want people bespoke, customised to their own circumstances to sit down and work these things out. There is no rulebook for this. We are in uncharted territory, but the goal should be shared. And that is a business that can reopen on the other side, not weighed down by excessive debts because of rental arrears. A landlord that has a tenant so they can continue into the future to be able to support the investments that they have made and banks that have clients, both the landlords and the businesses. The three of them working together to ensure those businesses can get through and be there on the other side.

Our message to businesses also, and so many have been doing this and I congratulate them for their innovation, and that is to rethink your business model. We now have restaurants who are acting through takeaway. Good for them. We have retail businesses that are doing more through their online platforms. We have phone ahead and pick up type services that are being established that remove the direct contact in retail circumstances. And people need to exercise their discretion when they are going into shopping centres and retail supermarkets and things of that nature to be observing the strict rules around social distancing.

We're asking businesses to adapt to what is not a usual set of circumstances. They must be sustainable because they will run for, we believe, at least six months and we want to be able to get everybody through. So we are seeking their support. We will have more to say about commercial tenancies in the days ahead.

The treasurers of all the states and territories, led by Josh Frydenberg as the federal Treasurer, have been working very hard on this. We'll be engaging with business and landlords and banks over the next couple of days to seek to get even stronger provisions in place so they can all sit down and get this sorted. But there's nothing stopping anyone sitting down tomorrow and working out a good deal that sees everybody through. It means everyone's going to have to carry a bit. The government also will be doing that as we move to our next phase of our economic supports so we can all get through. I'm going to pass you over to Professor Kelly- Murphy, sorry. We gave him a day off yesterday which he thoroughly deserved. And so thank you very much. Brendan.

**PROFESSOR BRENDAN MURPHY, CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER:** Thanks, Prime Minister. So I'm going to start tonight just by putting a little bit of perspective on the outbreak of coronavirus in Australia and give you a sense of some early hopeful signs. We've got an outbreak of 3,978 cases at the moment, much less than perhaps some people might have predicted some time ago without mitigation. So there is evidence that the public health measures that we're putting in place and the social distancing measures are likely having some early effect. I should say at the outset that we are not Italy, we are not the United States, we are not Spain. We have one of the highest rates of testing per head of population in the world and one of the lowest positive test rates. So we think, unlike countries like, unfortunately, like Italy, Iran and even the US, that when they detected significant outbreaks, they probably had much, much larger outbreaks in the community that were undetected. We feel reasonably confident that we are detecting a significant majority of the cases in Australia. That means that we can get on top of cases when they're detected. There are 5,000 or more public health workers in our state and territory public health units. I would like to give them a huge shout out tonight. They're the people who are contact tracing within hours, every contact of a positive case, asking them to isolate and protecting the community. If we can keep our numbers at a level where we can continue to contact trace, where people behave and isolate when they're asked to, we can really bring about good suppression.

As the Prime Minister has said, we have had a somewhat slowing of the growth in the epidemiology curve, but it's not enough. We have to slow it further. We have to slow it further. And we have to stop the thing that's worrying us most, which is community transmission, that's transmission without known links to a known case. And that is of concern, particularly in Sydney and to a lesser extent in Melbourne and south east Queensland. There are tiny pockets of it in other states. Those things do worry us because if you have outbreaks in the community, they can be much harder to detect. And so we've broadened the testing criteria in those areas to make sure that we can detect and bring under control. But because we are not sure that these measures that we put in place will take sufficient effect to bring the slope of the curve right down, that's why these additional measures are recommended by the National Cabinet tonight.

Essentially, all is being talked about is what we've been saying all week. We have to change the way we as people interact with each other. It's very simple. We need to all stay home unless we're going out to shop, to do personal exercise, to go to medical appointments or to go to work or study if you cannot work from home. So anyone who doesn't need to be out of their home should be in the home. This is radical and the vast majority of Australians have done the right thing in the last week. We've seen huge evidence of that. We've also seen some very silly behaviour of people who haven't complied with that, particularly outdoors and sometimes indoors. And that's why we feel that it's really important that every Australian does the right thing. Because for these interventions to take effect, the science shows that you need more than 90 per cent of the population to be doing it all the time. So please continue to do what you're doing. Continue to follow these rules. And hopefully these early signs of flattening will mean that we can keep going in getting a reduction in the rate of increase every day. Thanks, Prime Minister.

**JOURNALIST:** Just to clarify on having a group of two people, I assume that parents can still take their children to the park. Does the two person rule now apply to weddings or funerals? Or do the old numbers

apply? And yesterday we saw the Victorian Chief Medical Officer say that the public behaviour in some cases was, to use his word, “crap” and that if it didn't change we're on track to have 100,000 Covid-19 cases within three weeks. Do you agree with that prediction?

**PRIME MINISTER:** Well, I'll deal with the first issues first. It's your household, so your household can be together inside your home, outside your home, outside of your household. If you were out, Sam, just on the street today, you could be there with everyone who's in your household. But if you weren't with the members of your household, you could be there with one other person maximum. Ok? So that's what the rule is. In terms of the weddings and funerals, we believe the arrangements we have for those under those circumstances can remain as they have been. For funerals and for weddings, that was funerals at 10 and weddings at five. And of course, state and territories, as I said the other night, can exercise discretion on those matters on compassionate grounds as they see fit. In relation to the other matter, well, I'll refer to Dr Murphy.

**PROFESSOR BRENDAN MURPHY, CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER:** So I think Dr Sutton was commenting on some of the very isolated examples of pretty poor behaviour that he observed and I absolutely agree with him that it is totally irresponsible that people should behave like that. Now, 100,000 modelling would mean that we lost all mitigation control. We're not doing that. But I think what he's saying is if we have a big community outbreak and we lost control, then you would get very rapid doubling. Now, we have no intention of getting in that situation, which is why we're enforcing these measures. But at the moment, it is still a precarious position. If people don't take this seriously and we get big community outbreaks, they will be very hard to control. I'm not going to go into any particular number modelling. I think that's all speculative but I think his point is absolutely right that every single Australian needs to take this seriously or community transmission could get out of control and we could have a situation which is as terrible as we're seeing in the US even at the moment.

**JOURNALIST:** Prime Minister, if people over 70 should stay home, what's your advice on how they should get groceries, medicines, anything else they need?

**PRIME MINISTER:** Well, that's why we've been upping our investment and have states and territories as well in a lot of those home-based services for elderly residents. And also tonight, as I said, there is a registration feature, which I'm sure and I would hope that friends and family of those who are in that situation would be able to register and that also gives us that ability to know where people are. What this means is we've got to help each other, at the end of the day. I mean, they can still, it is not a strict rule. It is there for their own protection. And so what we're encouraging elderly residents to do is to stay home as much as is practicable and should they need support that I'm sure they can get support through their community or others. And I'm sure they could even ring their local MP and I'm sure their local MP and would want to help them in any way they could at either a state or federal level, because I've seen that already happening through many of our electorate offices. But I'm sure they could get support through other local community organisations, volunteer groups, that those services and those numbers are available. And so it is an advice that we're putting in place for their protection. It is not the medical advice that older Australians would be communicating the virus to others. It would be about their protection and that's why we'd be moving to do that. Yep, Michelle.

**JOURNALIST:** The two person rule applies presumably inside as well as outside, right?

**PRIME MINISTER:** Correct, like in a shopping centre as opposed to in a park.

**JOURNALIST:** So what is the rationale in that case for keeping shopping centres, apart from food shops, open?

**PRIME MINISTER:** Well, what we've said today is you should be only going out to shop for things that you actually need and you should be doing it on an irregular basis. I'll give you an example. Our kids are at home now, as are most kids, and Jenny went out yesterday and bought them a whole bunch of jigsaw puzzles. I can assure you over the next few months, we're going to consider those jigsaw puzzles absolutely essential. It's important that parents and families and households can get the things that they need to completely change the way they're going to live for the next six months at least. And so what we've done is sought to be practical about these issues. I mean, people are buying sporting equipment at the moment, gym mats and things like that so they can exercise at home. These are things they're going to need. Now, I don't think it's practical when we say for essentials and things that you really need that high-end fashion and these types of things. And that's why you've already seen a lot of those types of retail businesses already closed because people aren't doing that. And so, Michelle, what we've said is that for the purposes of work, where you can't work from home and you need to go to your workplace and there are many public servants who are in that situation, particularly in this town and many others, because of the important work they're doing, including tonight on the economic package, for example, then they can't do that from home and they will need to be at work. But when they are at work, as we are doing here in this very room, observing those social distancing and other important principles about four square metres per person, and that would apply in a learning environment as much as it would in a work environment. So these rules are intended to be instructive, to be a guide but on this two person rule and particularly on the 10, I mean, already from memory in South Australia an on the spot fine of \$1,000 if you violate that rule in South Australia. So they're not mucking around. They're very, very serious. And states like New South Wales and Victoria will move further down onto those two person rules, is my understanding. But states and territories will make their own announcements about those issues. What you're now seeing with the National Cabinet is what I've flagged now for several weeks. You will see some states and territories, depending on the extremity of the situation in their states, moving to other measures before other states and territories. That is completely understandable and is consistent with the way the National Cabinet is operating and it's being done with the full knowledge and discussion of the National Cabinet. They are all moving to the strong advice on two, some states and territories will move to an enforcement capability around that, two. Others will remain at the other level. But there's the rule, the guidance, the strong advice is don't gather together in groups. That's the simple way of putting it. Just don't do it. It's not helpful. It actually creates the risk. And when you're going out for shopping, you should be going for just stuff you need and do it and get home. It's not a time for browsing. It's not a time for catching up with friends or bumping into people and having a long conversation and maybe drawing a few other friends across to catch up on how it's all going. No, you can't do that anymore. That's what we have to stop doing. And that's why we're trying to keep as much of these sorts of things open for people as possible so they can get what they need. But as time goes on, the National Cabinet will continue to look at a lot of these businesses and may have to make further decisions in these areas. And in some cases, that may not be too far from now. Tom?

**JOURNALIST:** Prime Minister, just wanted to ask about this cluster of cases in 30 or so in the Barossa Valley, there's three or four towns there. I think there's a bit of localised restrictions going on put in by the state government. But you mentioned a week or so ago that there might be a sort of a localised shutdown action plan that you were coming up with. Is there a case to do that yet? Have you gone any further on that plan?

**PRIME MINISTER:** Well, where there's localised actions, and Dr Murphy may want to speak on this as well, they will be handled by the state jurisdictions themselves and they can take whatever further actions they think are necessary. And where you have those more localised outbreaks and then understanding what they are and the measures you can put in place around those villages, I mean, many of us may have visited them and you can set up cordons around those sorts of places and stop people coming in and out. In fact,

we're already doing that with large numbers of remote communities around the country right now. And so there is, I think, there's enough guidance and instruction to the states and territories to handle those matters when they present. But Brendan?

**PROFESSOR BRENDAN MURPHY, CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER:** So I think the important thing is to be able to contact trace and isolate everybody. And if you have a situation where there is a largish community outbreak and you're not sure that you've got on top of everything and that you haven't got all the contacts, then you might put in some localised restrictions. I'm not briefed on the details of those cases in the Barossa but that is something that is a weapon we always hold in reserve. That if you have a very localised but growing community outbreaks, one of the mechanisms to stop that spreading is to put localised restrictions of movement.

**PRIME MINISTER:** I'm going to go to Brett and then I'm going to have to call it because I have another meeting to go to on the very package which we're working on this evening with the Treasurer.

**JOURNALIST:** One of the big anxieties of people is just getting the basics. People still aren't able to buy toilet paper, hand sanitizer. We've been promised that those supply chains will normalise. That hasn't happened. When will that happen? That's one of the reasons people are leaving their houses quite a lot is to try to get the basics that they can't. And just secondly on Australians who are overseas, Labor says that the Government should have acted more quickly to get charter flights in place, it's now too late. I don't believe the Foreign Minister has had a press conference since March 6. Where is Marise Payne and could she be doing more to help those Australians?

**PRIME MINISTER:** Well, I mentioned some weeks ago, it was less than two weeks ago, that Marise Payne went into self isolation after she returned from an overseas visit. So that would explain why you're not seeing her at press conferences. I think that's entirely reasonable. Look, I'm not going to get drawn into the commentary on what the Labor Party is saying. Honestly, I'm too focused on doing what the Government needs to do, what the National Cabinet needs to do. We're engaging with the opposition on these matters, but I don't intend to get into a political commentary about these issues. I'm just not interested in the politics. Thank you very much. I have to go, I'm sorry.

**[END]**

**Contacts: Press Office, (02) 6277 7744  
The Hon. Scott Morrison MP, Sydney**