



Our Plan to get

**VICTORIA**

# Back to Work and Back in Business

COVID-19  
**RESPONSE**

NOVEMBER  
**UPDATE**



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**THE NATIONALS**  
*for Regional Victoria*



**Michael O'Brien MP**  
Liberal Leader

*Michael O'Brien*

Victorians have endured a lot this year. We battled through the havoc of summer bushfires and the devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**The effects of the pandemic have been far reaching and touched all of us in different and profound ways.** In Victoria, we now face more difficult social and economic recovery from the pandemic than anywhere else in Australia.

Victoria needs a plan to keep our community safe from COVID-19, but at the same time to turn our focus to **getting Victorians back to work to repair the economic damage that's been done by the lockdowns.**

The recovery will be hard, but it is an opportunity to reshape our state, rebuild businesses and industries, and **reclaim the Victorian way of life**, which made Melbourne the most liveable place in the world.

The Victorian Liberal Nationals' Back to Work Plan will generate new jobs throughout the Victorian economy and **return security, and the feeling of security, to all Victorians.**

This is not a plan for the next election in 2022; Victorians cannot wait that long. This is a plan for **immediate action** so that Victorians can overcome their concerns about providing for their families, meeting their mortgage and rent payments, educating their kids, keeping healthy and protecting elderly Victorians.

Our plan will help Victoria overcome the most significant public policy failure in Australia's history, in which the Labor Government's hotel quarantine breaches and failures of Victoria's contact tracing program, caused the social and economic devastation of the second wave of the pandemic.

**We encourage you to join us in calling on the State Government to adopt our plan to rebuild from the damage done to our jobs, our communities and our way of life – from today, not after the next election.**

November 2020



**Peter Walsh MP**  
The Nationals Leader

*Peter Walsh*



**Back  
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# Getting Victoria Back to Work and Back in Business

## OUR PLAN

- 1** SECURING YOUR FAMILY FINANCES
- 2** REBUILDING OPPORTUNITY FOR LOCAL BUSINESS
- 3** INVESTING IN HEALTH AND EDUCATION
- 4** SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITIES



# The damage to Victoria has been enormous

## Victorians have endured a period of extreme social dislocation, with some of the longest and most draconian lockdown measures imposed anywhere in the world.

Our kids have fallen behind at school, and the physical and mental health of Victorians has taken a battering.

Industries have been smashed by indiscriminate restrictions, and hundreds of thousands of Victorians have lost their job or had their hours substantially reduced.

Poorly targeted and inconsistent rules have prevented thousands of Victorian small businesses and sole traders from safely making a living. Many will not survive.

While Victoria has continued to fall behind, residents of other states like New South Wales have resumed more normal life and already made progress recovering their lives and livelihoods.

**The Victorian Treasury has forecast up to 325,000 job losses this year.** With the Victorian economy in recession since before the COVID pandemic and state government debt forecast to almost triple – to cover project blowouts and black holes – we have a difficult road to recovery ahead.

The Andrews Labor Government must deliver change. It cannot continue to deliver the same old thinking and expect a better result.

### VICTORIA NEEDS A PLAN TO REBUILD OUR LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS

The Andrews Labor Government must provide a detailed plan to rebuild Victorian jobs and livelihoods.

The Government cannot merely aim for pre-COVID levels of economic performance and government program delivery. That weak goal would leave us permanently behind other states which are already rebuilding.

### We need a new plan to rebuild a stronger and better performing Victoria.

The plan must restore business confidence and investment, generate new growth and employment opportunity, and provide

certainty that the mistakes that caused expansive lockdowns and shutdowns will not be repeated.

**The plan must assist businesses of all sizes to recover.** This means providing job-creating industries, targeted policy support and investment to revitalise and create new opportunity – whether in hospitality, manufacturing, construction, education or tourism.

The plan must also support new infrastructure builds that generate new jobs and economic growth – affordable housing, transport connections, and development of cheap, clean and reliable energy.

To ensure Victorians are delivered the recovery they need, the government must end its dangerous reliance on emergency powers, commit to regular Parliament sittings two weeks each month, and adopt this plan to get Victoria Back to Work and Back in Business.

## VICTORIA CONTINUES TO FALL BEHIND IN JOB CREATION



# Staying on target to ensure our recovery



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It's vital to know whether our state is on track to achieve the economic and social recovery that Victoria needs. These targets will be set and tracked for Victorians on our COVID-19 Recovery Community Dashboard which can be accessed here: [www.michaelobrien.com.au/covid-dashboard](http://www.michaelobrien.com.au/covid-dashboard)



## **JOBS**

Create 380,000 new jobs by 1 July 2022



## **YOUTH JOBS**

Restore 143,000 youth jobs by 1 January 2022



## **SKILLS & TRAINING**

Deliver 57,000 apprenticeship and traineeship commencements in the year to 31 March 2022



## **TAXES**

No new or increased taxes



## **SMALL BUSINESS**

Deliver continued business growth in Victoria with 704,000 small businesses operating by 1 July 2022



## **MENTAL HEALTH**

Reduce the annual number of mental health-related emergency department presentations below 90,000 by 1 January 2022



## **HEALTH**

Elective surgery wait list reduced to 39,000 people by 1 January 2022



## **EDUCATION**

10 per cent more students above the bottom 3 bands of NAPLAN in literacy and numeracy by 2022



## **COMMUNITY SAFETY**

Reduce youth crimes against the person to December 2014 levels by 1 July 2022

# 1 SECURING YOUR FAMILY FINANCES



“ Personal financial security means financial **peace of mind.** ”



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## Cost of living pressures have been getting progressively tougher, with COVID-19 suddenly and drastically making things much worse.

Victoria's unemployment is through the roof and job losses could reach more than 325,000 by the end of 2020. On top of that, tens of thousands of families have experienced a reduction in take-home wages.

### **No new taxes**

The Andrews Government has introduced 28 new or expanded taxes despite promising not to do so before it was elected.

- ✓ There must not be any increased or new taxes to fund the Government's unprecedented debt blowout.

### **Real action to reduce household bills**

- ✓ Freeze all local government rates until 30 June 2022 with funding support from the Andrews Government.
- ✓ A one-off increase to the energy concession to \$1000 per household until 1 January 2022.

- ✓ Work with the Federal Government to provide affordable childcare so that every parent, and particularly every woman, who is offered work is able to accept it.
- ✓ Implement the Liberal Nationals' Zero to Landfill plan to create a new, low emissions baseload energy supply for Victoria.
- ✓ Immediately remove the current moratorium on conventional onshore natural gas, and fast-track the development of new natural gas production.
- ✓ Freeze all household water and sewerage charges until 30 June 2022.
- ✓ Scrap the 60 per cent increase to the Landfill Levy.

### **Transport fees and charges**

- ✓ Freeze all toll road charges with Transurban and ConnectEast until 30 June 2022.
- ✓ Freeze all metropolitan and V/Line public transport fares until 30 June 2022
- ✓ Free public transport for school and university students until 1 January 2022.



- ✓ Waive registration payments for commercial vehicles grounded because of restrictions, and allow private vehicle registrations to be paused for up to 12 months.
- ✓ Half price registration to all P-plate drivers until 30 June 2022.



**Create 380,000 new jobs by 1 July 2022 to make up for those that have been lost.**

# 2 REBUILDING OPPORTUNITY FOR LOCAL BUSINESS

**The State Government's gross negligence has smashed small businesses and sole traders, and many will never recover. They are paying an enormous personal cost for the Andrews Labor Government's incompetence.**

Urgent support is required for these businesses whether they are in general retail, hairdressers and beauty services, gyms, landscape gardeners, or local cafés to survive this year and recover through 2021 and beyond.

Young Victorians have been particularly impacted, with more than 143,000 Victorians under 25 out of work since the start of 2020. Youth unemployment now exceeds 14 per cent. Now is the time for bold action to turn this around.

## **Get the employment rate back to pre-COVID-19 levels**

- ✓ Create 380,000 new jobs by 1 July 2022 to make up for those that have been lost (based on September ABS statistics).
- ✓ Labor must commit to restoring the 143,000 jobs young Victorians have lost by 1 January 2022.



**Raise the payroll tax threshold so businesses do not pay this tax on the first \$10 million of payroll to 30 June 2022.**

- ✓ Deliver 57,000 apprenticeship and traineeship commencements in the year to 31 March 2022 and provide retraining scholarships for people of all ages looking to re-skill in priority areas.
- ✓ Expand pre-apprenticeship programs and promote greater participation of women in trades.
- ✓ Free TAFE should be extended to people who have previously accessed free TAFE but now need to retrain in a different industry where demand and opportunity exists.
- ✓ Expand free TAFE to make all training free for occupations experiencing skill shortages in Victoria.
- ✓ Clear the backlog of TAFE students waiting to complete work placements or practical assessments to demonstrate competency by 30 June 2021.





## Establish a \$1 billion “Bringing Manufacturing Home” fund to encourage manufacturers to locate their facilities in Victoria.

### ✔ Cut employment taxes and charges for businesses

- ✔ Raise the payroll tax threshold so businesses do not pay this tax on the first \$10 million of payroll to 30 June 2022.
- ✔ Freeze fees and charges for businesses to 30 June 2022, including business licensing fees, and labour hire registration scheme fees and place a moratorium on the employer levy under the long service leave portability scheme.
- ✔ Provide WorkCover premium relief to businesses to 30 June 2022.

### ✔ Bring manufacturing home to Victoria

Under successive Labor Governments over the past 20 years, the number of manufacturing jobs in Victoria has fallen by more than 50,000.

- ✔ Establish a \$1 billion “Bringing Manufacturing Home” fund to encourage manufacturers to locate their facilities in Victoria.
- ✔ Prioritise support for industries of national importance such as PPE

manufacture, medical research, defence procurement, pharmaceuticals and rare earths processing.

- ✔ Invest in a “Victorian Made” marketing campaign, to showcase the quality and benefits of locally produced goods and services.

### ✔ Strengthen Victoria’s economic base

- ✔ Diversify our import base to ensure we are not dependent on any single country for more than 15 per cent of our goods imports.
- ✔ Develop an international student recommencement plan to return international students (tertiary and secondary) to study in Victoria.
- ✔ Support increased commercialisation between research institutions and industry in Victoria.
- ✔ Launch a \$100 million Science and Technology Innovation grants program to create new opportunities for the scientific and business community to collaborate in 2020-21.
- ✔ Re-introduce innovation vouchers for Victorian businesses to adopt new innovations and take advantage of productivity



improving change identified during lockdown restrictions.

- ✔ Support improved access to seed funding for startups.
- ✔ Expand Global Victoria in emerging economies throughout South-east Asia, India and Africa by substantially increasing Victoria’s outbound trade opportunities by June 2021.
- ✔ Ensure Victoria is getting the best representation in ongoing negotiations for the Australia-UK Free Trade Agreement.

### ✔ Restore local small businesses and sole traders

- ✔ Discount local government rates and permit fees for small businesses until 30 June 2022, with funding from the Victorian Government.

# 2 REBUILDING OPPORTUNITY FOR LOCAL BUSINESS

- ✓ Overhaul the Victorian Government's onerous turnover caps for small construction companies applying for government tenders.
- ✓ Prioritise Victorian Government purchasing and procurement from local suppliers.
- ✓ Make payment on government contracts within seven days.
- ✓ Streamline red tape and enforce statutory timeframes on Victorian Government decision-making.

## Boost investment and housing affordability in Melbourne

- ✓ Repeal C270 to promote flexibility and employment growth.
- ✓ Allow purchasers of new builds in 2020-21 to defer payment of stamp duty until 30 June 2022.
- ✓ Open up the HomeBuilder scheme to more Victorians by paying the grant upfront for new builds, allowing more Victorians to use it as a deposit on building a new home.
- ✓ Remove the cladding levy for any project that has 85 per cent or more local content until 30 June 2022.
- ✓ Work with industry to deliver 50,000 new homes under 'Build to Rent' projects, with 10 per cent of these to be provided as public housing.
- ✓ Release additional residential land for new housing developments.

## Connecting regional Victoria

- ✓ Immediately reinstate the Country Roads and Bridges Program.
- ✓ Begin construction of other major regional roads such as the Kilmore Bypass, Shepparton Bypass, Gippsland Princes Highway duplication, Ballarat Western Link Road (Stage 2) and Princes Highway (west of Colac) upgrade.

- ✓ Deliver the Murray Basin Rail Project in full by December 2022 to revolutionise supply chains in north-west Victoria.
- ✓ Provide \$10 million for the agricultural sector to digitise supply chains in order to unlock new trade opportunities and provide a faster flow of money for our farmers.





## Provide \$400 million to develop and upgrade tourist attractions across Victoria in 2021.

### **Kick-start Victorian tourism**

- ✓ Establish a dedicated \$300 million Victorian Tourism Fund to support tourism operators to recover and promote local tourism.
  - ✓ Establish 'Road Trip for Victoria' vouchers offering Victorians a 50 per cent discount up to \$200 on tours or accommodation when booking three nights or more, to stimulate Victorian tourism.
  - ✓ Ensure state borders reopen for interstate visitors as soon as possible.
  - ✓ Scrap all Government self-promotional advertising and redirect into advertising Victorian tourism.
  - ✓ Provide \$400 million to develop and upgrade tourist attractions across Victoria in 2021 and fast-track community supported private investment in tourism infrastructure on private land.
  - ✓ Return the tourism sector to December 2019 bed night accommodation levels by the end of 2021.
- ✓ Restore domestic and international air services to Avalon Airport as soon as possible.
  - ✓ Complete tourism infrastructure projects including the Grampians Peaks Trail, the Twelve Apostles Visitor Centre, Warburton Mountain Bike Destination, save the Cape Otway Lighthouse, and upgrade nature-based facilities to get people back to bushfire-impacted north-east Victoria and Gippsland.
  - ✓ Undertake urgent reform to streamline statutory planning approvals processes for tourism projects that deliver regional jobs.

### **Investing in transport infrastructure for Melbourne**

- ✓ Immediately commence infrastructure projects where planning and business cases exist, and federal money is available and allocated including the East West Link, Calder Park Drive upgrade, Jetty Road overpass in Rosebud, and Frankston Rail Line electrification.



# 2 REBUILDING OPPORTUNITY FOR LOCAL BUSINESS

- ✓ Provide additional funding to immediately advance planning works for the construction of Rowville Rail.
- ✓ Fast-track development of the Melbourne Airport Rail project.
- ✓ Commence upgrades of Southern Cross Station and Flinders Street Station where opportunity and plans exist to immediately progress projects with the private sector.
- ✓ Establish a new \$200 million Metropolitan Road and Bike Paths Fund for smaller projects around greater Melbourne.

## Support events and hospitality

- ✓ Launch an 'Eat out for Victoria' program for a period of four weeks as soon as dine-in restaurants are permitted to operate at a COVID normal capacity. This would subsidize 50 per cent of bills up to a maximum of \$20 per person.
- ✓ Support the events industry by developing a proactive plan to get small and large events up and running again as soon as possible with supported COVID safe plans and infrastructure.
- ✓ Provide \$50 million towards attracting new events for Melbourne and Regional Victoria that appeal to the Australian market, and



\$20 million for a Regional Victorian Art Trail Fund with supported infrastructure and COVID-safe plans.

- ✓ Facilitate the recovery of the creative industries sector, which has lost tens of thousands of jobs, to pre-COVID-19 employment levels by 1 January 2022.

- ✓ Establish a \$100 million Creative Industries Restoration Fund to help our world-class music and arts thrive in a COVID-normal world.

“The **“Eat Out for Victoria”** proposal is just what our pubs and restaurants need to get up and going after the lockdowns.”

**PAUL DIMATTINA**, Lamaro's Hotel, South Melbourne





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**Our plan focuses  
on generating  
new jobs and  
rebuilding our  
economy to be  
the strongest  
and most diverse  
in Australia.**

# 3 INVESTING IN HEALTH AND EDUCATION

**The Victorian Government must manage the threat of COVID-19, while providing Victorians with the opportunity to resume living in a 'COVID-normal' environment until there is a vaccine.**

Victoria's elective surgery wait list had blown out past record levels in March and is now worse than ever. On top of this other Victorians are stuck on the 'hidden waitlist', and many have deferred treatment due to government restrictions.

The social dislocation of lockdown has caused a significant increase in mental health issues experienced by Victorians. Improved resources to support those at risk must be prioritised.

Our children's schooling has been severely disrupted by the pandemic. Parents and teachers have done their best but nothing replaces time in the classroom. A serious plan for catch-up is needed or a whole generation of young Victorians face a wasted year.

## **A stronger health system**

- ✓ Commit to ongoing rapid testing for health services, aged care, and other sectors where a high risk of COVID-19 transmission exists.



- ✓ Make Victoria self-sufficient, ensuring we have adequate supplies of personal protective equipment, ventilators and essential medical equipment in preparation for any future health crisis.
- ✓ Fast-track the building of new and upgraded community hospitals previously committed to, in metropolitan Melbourne and throughout Regional Victoria.
- ✓ Increase funding to the Victorian Infectious Disease Centre at Royal Melbourne Hospital to guarantee best practice in confronting this and future pandemics.
- ✓ Provide additional funding to ensure medical research for cancer and other chronic diseases is not left behind.
- ✓ Provide stronger support and better partnerships with providers in aged care, mental health and disability sectors and strengthen provision of services in community health.
- ✓ Split the current Department of Health and Human Services into separate Health and Human Services departments.
- ✓ Establish a permanent state committee of health experts, similar to the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, to monitor all major global and local health threats, and provide regular reports to government on appropriate responses.



## Additional funding to bring Victoria's mental health funding and service to at least the national average.

### Support mental health and community well-being

- ✓ Provide extra funding to bring Victoria's mental health funding and service to at least the national average.
- ✓ Increase clinical support for young people and the acute bed rate to the national average.
- ✓ Immediately improve access to mental health services.
- ✓ Develop and implement a detailed strategy to mitigate harm caused by lockdown and its residual impact on the mental health of Victorians.

- ✓ Increase the number of mental health outreach support services.
- ✓ Expand the Hospital Outreach Post-suicidal Engagement initiative to additional hospitals across Victoria in 2021.
- ✓ Scrap the proposed Mental Health Tax.

### Reduce Victoria's healthcare wait lists

- ✓ Set and publish targets for referral to treatment times so Victorians know how long they'll actually be waiting for elective surgery.

- ✓ Return the elective surgery wait list to 39,000 people by 1 January 2022.
- ✓ Return wait-times for general dental to pre COVID-19 levels by 1 January 2022.
- ✓ Review the impact of deferred treatment for chronic disease on individuals and the health system.

### Quality education and early childhood learning

- ✓ Immediately commence intensive catch-up classes and small-group tutoring focused on literacy and numeracy, with all necessary additional assessment and curricular support resources made available to schools to ensure students are catching up as quickly as possible.
- ✓ Provide dedicated mental health practitioners to all state primary schools in 2021 to ensure quick and reliable access to support.
- ✓ Provide \$7 million for education support agencies to expand their literacy and numeracy skill-building programs and well-being support services in high-needs areas.



# 3 INVESTING IN HEALTH AND EDUCATION

- ✓ Provide vouchers for primary school kids to participate in educational, creative or sporting activity programs over summer so they have the opportunity to be both social and active during the break.
- ✓ Work with outdoor education, camps providers and alpine resorts to offer 3-5 day camps in January 2021 for children who have suffered socially and emotionally and provide incentives to schools booking camps in term 1.
- ✓ Accelerate the roll out of 15 hours of Funded Three-Year-Old Kindergarten to all areas of Victoria.
- ✓ Work with the Federal Government to provide affordable childcare that includes extended hours care for all kindergartens.
- ✓ Immediately undertake a maintenance blitz of government schools.
- ✓ All funding previously committed for improvements to Independent and Catholic schools should be brought forward and delivered by local contractors, using local materials.

“It’s so **important that our kids have the chance to catch up** after the disruption of this year.”

**SARA JOHNSON**, Hampton



Immediately commence intensive catch-up classes and small-group tutoring focused on literacy and numeracy.



# 4 SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITIES



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**With the severe economic damage and social disruption caused by lockdowns, Victoria needs a proactive approach to support our communities, protect the vulnerable and improve quality of life for all.**

## **Support Victorians relocating to regional Victoria**

- ✓ Provide a \$250 million fund to assist businesses and government agencies to permanently transform their operations to allow their staff to work from home more often and live where they want to.
- ✓ Abolish regional payroll tax to 30 June 2022 to encourage more businesses to move operations into the regions.
- ✓ Establish a process for local government areas adjacent to metropolitan Melbourne to be reclassified as regional Victoria.

## **Community services for vulnerable Victorians**

- ✓ Provide \$10 million for reboot grants to senior citizens' clubs, including



Probus, multicultural seniors' groups and U3As to defeat isolation.

- ✓ Boost capital works upgrades for public aged care facilities to make sure all have single rooms and ensuites to help stop the spread of infectious disease such as COVID-19.
- ✓ Reduce the social housing wait list to 42,000 by 1 January 2022.
- ✓ Increase funding to the not-for-profit and community sector

to support their work in family violence, homelessness and other home programs.

## **Improve our local environment**

- ✓ Immediately implement the Liberal Nationals' Zero to Landfill plan to boost recycling and use waste as an energy source.
- ✓ Victoria must fast-track implementation of the Container Deposit Scheme.



**Abolish regional payroll tax to 30 June 2022 to encourage more businesses to move operations into the regions.**

# 4 SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITIES



- ✓ Plant 1 million new trees in Victoria a year over the next two years.
- ✓ More funding to Victorian Landcare, and grants should be expanded to support community organisations and disability support employers to grow, plant and care for trees.

## Support local sport and recreation

- ✓ Grants of up to \$50,000 to grassroots clubs to assist recovery following the losses caused by lockdowns.
- ✓ \$100 Sports and Recreation Participation vouchers for all Victorian primary and secondary



**\$100 Sports and Recreation Participation vouchers for eligible all Victorian primary and secondary school students.**

school students to claim as a discount on local sport and recreation membership fees when registering with a sporting club, dance school, learn to swim or other recreation providers before 1 January 2022.

- ✓ Matched funding of up to \$1 million to any grassroots club to commence capital works projects prior to 31 December 2021.

“Clubs like ours have battled this year. **Grants like those proposed by the Liberal & Nationals are just what we need to get going.**”

**TEENA JOHNSON,**  
Morwell Bowls club

### Get police back into local communities

- ✓ Ensure that Protective Services Officers are returned to our train stations from 6.00pm until last train as soon as possible.
- ✓ Urgently reopen every one of the recently closed police stations to the community as soon as it is safe to do so.
- ✓ Bring forward police and emergency services infrastructure upgrade programs to give our hard working first responders the infrastructure they deserve, while supporting local builders, tradies and other small businesses.
- ✓ Rebuild key 24-hour police stations such as Narre Warren, Benalla, Prahran and Hamilton, and prioritise new emergency services infrastructure for growing communities.

### Keep justice moving

- ✓ Provide \$10 million for VCAT to undertake a case blitz by employing temporary tribunal members to tackle case backlogs and return listing times to normal.
- ✓ Urgently implement video conferencing and other technology to keep the courts moving and ensure the caseload backlogs for 2020-2021 are no more than those in 2018-2019 in the Children's and Magistrates Courts.
- ✓ Return of jury trials as soon as possible.

“ We are focused on **tackling the causes** of crime not just the symptoms. ”





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