



International Health Workers & COVID-19

The Department of Health has been working closely with the states & territories, medical colleges, universities and various other health professional groups to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

To ensure Australia's health system can cope with the increased demand for intensive care units and hospital beds, the department is working to ensure there is capacity to temporarily boost the health workforce in Australia during the COVID-19 outbreak. The department is also working to provide workforce surge capacity for GPs and GP clinics, aged care facilities and hospitals that may lose staff due to illness or self-quarantine.

Our focus has been to identify the capacity of the current workforce as well as the potential standby surge workforce, while working with our contracted organisations to understand their capacity to respond. This includes considering how best to mobilise the workforce when needed, bearing in mind current border restrictions in place within Australia.

This fact sheet provides a single source of information on border restrictions, international student working hours and visa issues to assist providers and jurisdictions in preparing their workforce response.

International students & working hours

Certain student visa holders are now temporarily permitted to work more than 40 hours per fortnight to support the supply of essential goods and services for Australians if they are:

- employed in the health sector, enrolled in a health-related course (such as nursing or medicine) and are directed by a health official to assist in the effort against COVID-19, OR
- employed in aged care by an Approved Provider or Commonwealth-funded aged care service provider, OR
- employed by a registered National Disability Insurance Scheme provider.

Student visa holders do not need to apply for this temporary measure, and are encouraged to contact their employer.

Employers must continue to follow Australian workplace law. Overseas workers, including international students, have the same rights under Australian workplace law as all other employees.

These temporary measures will be reviewed by the government regularly. Employers will be advised when these measures no longer apply.

See the [Department of Home Affairs](#) for more information.

Entering Australia

It is possible to travel to Australia if you are an Australian citizen, permanent resident, an immediate family member of an Australian citizen or permanent resident, or are a New Zealand citizen usually residing in Australia.

Temporary visa holders (that do not hold a 'Partner' or 'Child' subclass) that wish to enter Australia will need to apply for an exemption from the Commissioner of the Australian Border Force (ABF).

The ABF Commissioner may consider an additional exemption in relation to the travel restrictions currently in place for:

- foreign nationals travelling at the invitation of the Australian Commonwealth Government for the purpose of **assisting in the COVID-19 response** or whose entry would be in the national interest;
- **critical medical services**, including air ambulance and delivery of supplies, that regularly arrive into Australia from international ports;
- people with **critical skills** (for example, medical specialists, engineers, marine pilots and crews) by exception;
- **diplomats** accredited to Australia and currently resident in Australia, and their immediate family;
- case-by-case exceptions for humanitarian or compassionate reasons.

Exemptions must be granted **prior to travelling to Australia**. For those that do not yet hold a visa, it is recommended that travellers reconsider their need to apply for an Australian visa at this time, the Department is prioritising processing visa applications for those travellers in the exempt categories to support urgent travel. For further information, including how to apply, please refer to the [Department of Home Affairs](#).

Working Holiday Maker visa holders

The Australian Government has introduced new measures in response to COVID-19. Working Holiday Maker visa holders (subclass 417) who are employed in critical sectors including agriculture, health, aged and disability care and childcare will be exempt from the six month work limitation with one employer.

Working Holiday Maker visa holders employed in critical sectors who:

- have not completed the 3 or 6 months of specified work required to apply for a second or third Working Holiday Maker visa, and
- are unable to return to their home country

can apply for COVID-19 pandemic Temporary Activity Visa (subclass 408) Australian Government Endorsed Agreement Event (AGEE) stream visa and will not incur a visa application charge. This visa will allow the person to remain lawfully in Australia, and continue working, should they wish to do so, until it is safe and practicable for them to return to their home country.

To be granted a new visa, applicants must meet the requirements for that visa, including any age limits, English language, health and character requirements.

Working Holiday Maker visa holders can do any kind of work during their stay in Australia, but this is generally limited to six months' work with any one employer, unless the Department of Home Affairs has given permission to work with the same employer for longer than six months.

Working Holiday Maker visa holders working in critical sectors, like health, aged care or agriculture **have permission from the Department of Home Affairs to work for the same employer for longer than six months, on the grounds of exceptional, unforeseen circumstances.**

In any other circumstance, the visa holder needs to request permission to work with the same employer for longer than 6 months.

Border exemptions (states & territories)

Across Australia, jurisdictions have approached the closing of their borders differently depending on their own situation and geography. While not all states and territories have closed their borders, some have implemented processes to request entry into their jurisdiction for particular workers and industries.

At present, New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory **have not introduced border restrictions**, but strongly recommend against any non-essential travel.

South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland, Tasmania and the Northern Territory **have introduced border restrictions**. Essential health workers may be allowed to enter once they have received the necessary permissions. With the exception of South Australia, all jurisdictions with border restrictions in place have processes and applications available on their jurisdiction's website. Please note, additional restrictions may be in place for remote Indigenous communities.

Applicants need to ensure that any formal application is accompanied with a letter from their employer, and provides as much information as possible about the importance of the role (for example, critical skills, possible undersupply, system burden issues, etc).

If an application for a border exemption is denied, applicants may reapply, and are encouraged to provide additional (and where possible) more formal information to support the application.

For detailed information, it is recommended that health workers contact the jurisdiction they wish to travel to.