

COVID-19 Tax Relief Measures

1 April 2020

What relief is available for barristers?

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) has been declared a public health emergency by the World Health Organisation. Federal and State Governments are taking steps to limit the spread of COVID-19 in the community. This is having severe implications for large parts of the economy. In response, both State and Federal Governments have announced extensive support packages for individuals (including sole-traders) and small to medium businesses. Below, we have highlighted those measures most relevant for barristers as at 1 April 2020.



What support is available to affected individuals and sole-traders?

Measures	Detail	Process and timing
JobKeeper payment	<p>Businesses impacted by the Coronavirus will be able to access a subsidy from the Government to continue paying their employees. This will also apply to a sole trader without any employees. Eligible sole-traders will be able to claim a fortnightly payment of AUD\$1,500 from 30 March 2020, for a maximum period of 6 months if they have experienced a fall in turnover of more than 30% relative to a comparable period (of at least a month) a year ago (for a business with a turnover of less than AUD\$1 billion).</p> <p>Once registered with the ATO, individuals will need to provide an ABN for their business, nominate an individual to receive the payment, provide that individual's Tax File Number and provide a declaration as to recent business activity. A monthly update will also need to be provided to the ATO to declare the self-employed individual's continued eligibility for the payments.</p> <p><i>Note: The above information is based on the Federal Government's announcement dated 30 March 2020 and may change subject to the enactment of relevant legislation.</i></p>	<p>Register your interest in applying for the payment via the ATO website.</p> <p>First payments expected to be received by sole traders in the first week of May 2020.</p> <p>Payment will be made monthly to the self-employed individual's bank account.</p>



What support is available to affected individuals and sole-traders? (continued...)

Measures	Detail	Process and timing
Early withdrawal of super	Eligible individuals can access up to AUD\$10,000 of their superannuation before 1 July 2020. They will also be able to access up to a further AUD\$10,000 from 1 July 2020 until 24 September 2020. Sole traders that have a reduction in their turnover of 20% or more on or after 1 January 2020 or those whose businesses are suspended are eligible to apply for this concession.	Apply to the ATO online via myGov . Available from mid-April.
Income support	Relaxed eligibility to income support payments (including waiving the assets test) and a new time-limited Coronavirus supplement of AUD\$550 per fortnight. The supplement will be paid to both existing and new recipients of the eligible payment categories which will be extended to cover sole traders, the self-employed, casual workers; and contract workers. These changes will apply for the next six months. Income test cut-off points depend on your individual circumstances. You will generally not be eligible for income support via Centrelink if you are in receipt of JobKeeper payments.	Register your intention to claim a Centrelink payment via myGov . Available immediately.
Distressed businesses	A range of temporary changes to the <i>Corporations Act 2001</i> (Cth) including a temporary increase in threshold at which creditors can issue a statutory demand and time to respond (from 21 days to six months), a temporary increase in the threshold for a creditor to initiate bankruptcy proceedings (from AUD\$5,000 to AUD\$20,000), an increase in the time period for debtors to respond to a bankruptcy notice, and extending the period of protection a debtor receives after making a declaration of intention to present a debtor's petition.	Effective immediately.



What Australian Taxation Office relief is available if I need help meeting my tax obligations?

Measures	Detail	Process and timing
Deferral of payments	Taxpayers can apply to defer, by up to six months, the payment date of amounts due after 23 January 2020 through activity statements (including Pay As You Go (PAYG) instalments, net goods and services tax (GST) amounts payable), income tax assessments, FBT assessments and excise. Note that any tax amounts that are deferred still remain as debts due to the Australian Taxation Office (ATO).	ATO relief measures are not applied automatically. To apply for ATO relief contact ATO Emergency Support Infoline on 1800 806 218.



What Australian Taxation Office relief is available if I need help meeting my tax obligations? (continued...)

Measures	Detail	Process and timing
Varying PAYG instalments	Where there is likely to be a reduction in taxable income for the year, PAYG income tax instalments can be varied to zero for the March 2020 quarter. Taxpayers that vary their PAYG instalments can also claim a refund for any instalments made for the September 2019 and December 2019 quarters. No penalties or interest will be charged for variations to PAYG instalments for the 2019-20 year. Note that any actual income tax liability due for the current 2019-20 income year will remain due upon assessment following lodgment of the 2020 income tax return in due course.	ATO relief measures are not applied automatically. To apply for ATO relief contact ATO Emergency Support Infoline on 1800 806 218
Changing GST reporting cycle	Businesses on a quarterly reporting cycle for GST may be able to opt into monthly GST reporting in order to gain quicker access to net GST refunds to which they may be entitled.	
Remitting interest and penalties	Upon request, the ATO will remit interest and penalties that have been applied to outstanding tax liabilities from 23 January 2020.	
Low interest payment plans	The ATO can also assist with a range of low interest payment plans for existing and ongoing tax liabilities.	
Lodgment deferrals	Whilst it is expected that most taxpayers will be able to continue to meet their lodgment obligations, lodgment deferrals are available on a case-by-case basis. If you are required to lodge your tax return on your own because your tax agent is closed due to COVID-19, you can still lodge your return by the tax agent deferred due date.	



What support is available to affected businesses?

Measures	Detail	Process and timing
Support business investment	To support continued business investment, the Federal Government has provided the following investment allowances for businesses with aggregated turnover of up to AUD\$500 million: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing the cap and eligibility for an instant asset write off until 30 June 2020 (now available for new and second hand assets costing up to AUD\$150,000), and Providing accelerated depreciation on new assets until 30 June 2021. 	Available as additional tax deductions in your tax returns from the 2019-20 income year. Broadly applies for assets first used or installed ready for use from 12 March 2020.



What support is available for affected employers?

Measures	Detail	Process and timing
JobKeeper payment	<p>Employers impacted by the Coronavirus will be able to access a subsidy from the Government to continue paying their employees. Eligible employers will be able to claim a fortnightly payment of AUD\$1,500 per eligible employee from 30 March 2020, for a maximum period of 6 months. An employer will be eligible to receive these payments if their business experiences a fall in turnover of more than 30% relative to a comparable period a year ago (of at least a month) (for a business with a turnover of less than AUD\$1 billion).</p> <p>To be eligible to claim the payment, the employer must have been in an employment relationship with eligible employees as at 1 March 2020. Eligible employees include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• those currently employed by the eligible employer (including those previously stood down or re-hired), and• full-time, part-time, or long-term casuals (a casual employed on a regular basis for longer than 12 months as at 1 March 2020); and• are at least 16 years of age; and• are an Australian citizen, the holder of a permanent visa, or a Special Category (Subclass 444) Visa Holder; and• are not in receipt of a JobKeeper Payment from another employer. <p>Once registered with the ATO, eligible employers will need to identify and notify eligible employees for the payments, and must provide monthly updates to the ATO.</p> <p><i>Note: The above information is based on the Federal Government's announcement dated 30 March 2020 and may change subject to enactment of the legislation.</i></p>	<p>Register your interest in applying for the payment via ATO website.</p> <p>First payment will be received by employers from the ATO in the first week of May 2020.</p>



What support is available for affected employers? (continued...)

Measures	Detail	Process and timing
<p>Cash flow boost</p>	<p>Small and medium employers (those with aggregated turnover of less than AUD\$50 million) will receive a temporary cash flow boost delivered via activity statements. An automatic payment or credit to be applied on upcoming activity statements of at least AUD\$20,000 and up to AUD\$100,000, delivered in two rounds.</p> <p>First round payments will be delivered as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For quarterly payers, the amount will be 100% of the amount of PAYG Withholding reported at W2 on activity statements for the March and June 2020 quarters, subject to the minimum of AUD\$10,000 and the maximum of AUD\$50,000 for the first round payments . For monthly payers, the amount for March 2020 will be 300% of the amount reported at W2 for March 2020, and 100% of the amount at W2 for April, May and June 2020, subject to the minimum of AUD\$10,000 and the maximum of AUD\$50,000 for the first round payments. <p>A second round of payments equal to the total of the first round will be paid after 30 June 2020.</p> <p>These payments are only available to active eligible employers generally established and registered with an ABN prior to 12 March 2020. These amounts will be automatically offset against other outstanding tax liabilities unless the recipient requests the Commissioner of Taxation to not do so.</p>	<p>Lodge your activity statements as usual from 1 April 2020.</p> <p>Your eligibility will be determined based on amounts disclosed at items W1 and W2 of the Activity Statement - there is no need to formally apply. Refer to this ATO website for more.</p> <p>First round of payments - from 28 April 2020.</p> <p>Second round of payments - from 21 July 2020.</p>
<p>Payroll tax relief</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NSW - A waiver of payroll tax liabilities due in respect of the period April to June 2020 and a 25% reduction in the 2019-20 payroll tax liability in annual reconciliation. VIC - Full payroll tax refunds for the 2019-20 financial year and a deferral of payroll tax for the first three months of the 2020-21 financial year until 1 January 2021. WA - A waiver of payroll tax is available for the period between 1 March 2020 to 30 June 2020. QLD - Refund of payroll tax for two months, a three-month payroll tax holiday and a deferral of payroll tax for the remainder of the 2020 calendar year. 	<p>Timing, eligibility criteria and process differ between jurisdictions.</p> <p>Some measures are automatic, whilst some must be applied for with the relevant State revenue office.</p>



What support is available for affected employers? (continued...)

Measures	Detail	Process and timing
Payroll tax relief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SA - Six month deferral of payroll tax (for the return periods of March 2020 to August 2020). 	Timing, eligibility criteria and process differ between jurisdictions. Some measures are automatic, whilst some must be applied for with the relevant State revenue office.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACT - Deferral of payroll tax for the 2020-21 year until 1 July 2022. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TAS - Waiver of payroll tax for the entire 2019-20 year with refunds available. 	



What other issues should I be thinking about?

Issue	Detail
Deductions for home office expenses	A deduction may be available for home office expenses including heating, cooling and lighting in the dedicated area you are working from, work-related phone and internet costs and the purchase of home office equipment which may qualify for an outright deduction or a deduction for decline in value (depreciation). Refer to PwC's Airtax working from home office guide for more information.
Deductions for protective items e.g. gloves, face masks, sanitiser	Deductions for protective items will generally only be available if an individual incurred the expense themselves and there is sufficient connection with the earning of assessable income. For example, an individual who is exposed to the risk of illness in the course of carrying out their income earning activities (for example, medical staff or cleaner). Refer to ATO frequently asked questions for more information.
Providing non-cash benefits to employees	If non cash benefits are provided to employees, such as a laptop, in addition to their salary or wages, this may have fringe benefits tax (FBT) implications. Note that exemptions may apply for work related devices and/or minor, infrequent and irregular benefits of less than AUD\$300. There is also an exemption for emergency assistance that may apply to certain benefits provided.
Other relief available	<p>The Government will provide a guarantee to support new short-term unsecured loans to small and medium businesses. Some States have also announced support by way of loans to small and medium businesses. Eligibility requirements for these measures vary.</p> <p>In addition, some States and Territories have announced relief measures including rent relief for commercial tenants in government buildings, land tax deferrals and waiving or refunds of rates and licencing fees.</p>

Additional information in relation to the measures outlined in this publication is available here:

- [PwC guidance on tax obligations and relief for businesses affected by COVID-19](#)
- [Treasury fact sheets on the economic response to COVID-19](#)
- [ATO one-stop-shop for assistance on COVID-19](#)
- [ATO COVID-19 frequently asked questions](#)
- [ATO and Australian Bar Association \(ABA\) service commitment](#)

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