



Herald Sun (Melbourne)

Saturday 9/01/2021

Page: 62
Section: Editorials
Region: Melbourne, AU
Circulation: 303140
Type: Capital City Daily
Size: 283.00 sq.cms.



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Herald Sun

Businesses need a leg up

CORONAVIRUS shutdowns had a huge effect on many Victorian businesses, but the true impact of the damage is finally starting to be revealed.

As reported in the Saturday Herald Sun, research by lobby group Small Business Australia shows that one in three small businesses in this state face the prospect of immediate closure.

It found that more than half of these operators would close down permanently, while the rest would shut up shop for an indefinite period.

Nationally, 75 per cent of businesses had applied for some form of government support, but a staggering 250,000 firms did not receive any financial help.

It's no wonder that business people like Helloworld travel agency owner John Williams, who is 72, feel devastated by pandemic shutdowns.

"We've been forced to sell up things we've worked hard for over 28 years," he said.

"Superannuation is gone, banks won't lend us any more money. We're at an age now where we should be retired but we can't."

Small Business Australia executive director Bill Lang said: "Through no fault of their own, business owners are being put out of business."

Mr Lang wants state and federal governments to do more to help struggling owners, such as changing federal laws to protect small business owners from legal bankruptcy due to losing their business because of the COVID response.

At a state level, Mr Lang wants a

pro-rated commercial rent solution to keep small businesses afloat.

We agree that governments should do more to help businesses, as many are run by mum-and-dad owners who could not operate from home during shutdowns.

Action must be taken to ensure that there are no generational impacts with so many businesses falling over or facing closure.

This is not just about saving physical shops, we are talking about the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of Australians.

While the new year has brought good news with the prospect of a coronavirus vaccine program starting soon, new cases have provided a reality check that the virus is not going away.

Brisbane has been dramatically locked down for three days to contain a potential outbreak of a mutant strain of COVID-19.

It is to be hoped that this is quickly settled to prevent further disruption to the movement of people around Australia, especially during the holiday period.

There were visible signs of relief at Melbourne Airport among Victorian travellers who beat the lockdown in the nick of time and returned home.

As fears grow over the super virus strain from the UK, our political leaders have taken action to help stop any more outbreaks here.

National Cabinet has agreed to introduce pre-flight testing for travellers headed to Australia from the UK.

This means negative COVID-19 tests will have to be produced within

72 hours of boarding a flight.

Cabinet also agreed that passengers aged 12 and over on domestic and international flights will now be required to wear a mask.

And all hotel quarantine staff across Australia will be subjected to daily COVID tests, instead of weekly as occurs in most states.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison also announced the halving of international arrival caps until February 15. "The purpose here is to both reduce and de-bulk the risk in terms of exposure to the new strain," he said.

It is welcome that our political leaders are co-operating well on the threat, but it is incumbent on all of us not to relax and ensure we are following all of the social distancing and hygiene rules.