

8th July 2020

The Hon. Scott Morrison, MP
Prime Minister of Australia
Parliament House
PO BOX 6022, Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

Local governments around the country are gravely concerned about the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic, and the impact it is already having on the most vulnerable members of our community. Many councils included in this letter are home to people seeking asylum living in our communities, many of whom are receiving limited to no support by the Federal Government at this critical time.

This cohort of people, including those that are awaiting an appeal process or who have exhausted their review options, are in a uniquely vulnerable situation. Many have already been exited from the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) program, and those that were fortunate enough to find work now face long-term unemployment as the economy contracts with casual jobs already having been the first to go.

Without access to a liveable income, demand for emergency relief and housing support has already increased, placing a growing strain on already overstretched service providers, and subsequently leaving many community members destitute with zero income to survive on.

The Government has already flagged people who were on the pathway to citizenship would have welfare waiting periods waived so they could access the same benefits as Australian job seekers. Students and apprentices have also received increases of \$550 to their fortnightly payments in response to COVID-19. These are commendable actions taken by the Morrison Government.

In light of these vital support measures, we are calling on the Federal Government to provide similar provisions for people seeking asylum. We believe as a matter of principle, people seeking asylum should have:

- **Access to Medicare** – During this global pandemic, our world-leading health system must be available to everyone, to protect themselves and those around them.
- **Income support for those out of work** – Many people seeking asylum have lost their jobs as a result of the COVID-19 economic downturn. They cannot return home. Therefore the Government should look to ensure they have the support necessary to avoid becoming destitute at this time. This could include enabling people seeking asylum on Bridging Visas to have access to the JobSeeker Payment for the duration of the pandemic, or at the very least, changing the eligibility criteria for SRSS.
- **Valid visas** – Visa security is necessary not only for people to access vital services but also to ensure that visa status, or the lack thereof, is not a barrier to people seeking COVID-19 testing and treatment. The Government needs to ensure people's visas are renewed before their expiry and to ensure there are no gaps where people are left destitute.

Without an adequate safety-net in place, it is not possible for people to protect themselves from infection and self-isolate themselves. To prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the Government needs to ensure basic support to all members of the community facing destitution, as we are all in this together. This in turn protects the wider community and public health.

Once again, we thank the Federal Government for its decisive work thus far in mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on our communities and ask that this positive work be expanded to include people seeking asylum.

Please feel free to contact Marek Krol on 0413 280 903 or at marek.krol@cgd.vic.gov.au if you have any queries in relation to this request.

Yours faithfully,

Mayor Cr Khal Asfour, City of Canterbury-Bankstown, NSW

Chief Minister Andrew Barr MLA, ACT Government, ACT

Mayor Darcy Byrne, Inner West Council, NSW

Mayor Cr Samantha Byrne, Moonee Valley City Council, VIC

President Barry Calvert, Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils, NSW

Mayor Cr Barry Calvert, Hawkesbury City Council, NSW

Lord Mayor Sally Capp, City of Melbourne, VIC

Mayor Cr Lara Carli, Melton City Council, VIC

Mayor Sarah Carter, Maribyrnong City Council, VIC

Mayor Cr Alison Champion, Banyule City Council, VIC

Mayor Emma Cole, City of Vincent, WA

Mayor Cr Misha Coleman, City of Yarra, VIC

Mayor Cr Ross Ebbels, Borough of Queenscliffe, VIC

Mayor Cr Colleen Gates, Hobsons Bay City Council, VIC

Mayor Cr Josh Gilligan, Wyndham City Council, VIC

Mayor Cr Mark Greenhill, Blue Mountains City Council, NSW

Mayor Cr Sam Hearn, Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, VIC

Mayor Heather Holmes-Ross, City of Mitcham, WA

Mayor Cr Stuart James, City of Monash, VIC

Mayor Licia Kokocinski, Hepburn Shire Council, VIC

Mayor Jerome Laxale, City of Ryde, NSW

Mayor Cr Paula Masselos, Waverley Council, NSW

Mayor Cr Paul Maytom, Leeton Shire Council, NSW

Mayor Cr Jim Memeti, City of Greater Dandenong, VIC

Mayor Cr Carly Moore, Hume City Council, VIC

Mayor David O'Loughlin, City of Prospect, SA

Mayor Cr Georgina Papafotiou, Brimbank City Council, VIC

Mayor Cr Susan Rennie, City of Darebin, VIC

Lord Mayor Cr Anna Reynolds, City of Hobart, TAS

President Coral Ross, Municipal Association of Victoria, VIC

Mayor Cr Danny Said, Randwick City Council, NSW

President Linda Scott, Local Government NSW, NSW

Deputy Lord Mayor Jess Scully, City of Sydney, NSW

Mayor Cr Jeff Springfield, Cardinia Shire Council, VIC

Mayor Cr Lambros Tapinos, Moreland City Council, VIC

Mayor Bernadene Voss, City of Port Phillip, VIC

Mayor Wendy Waller, Liverpool City Council, NSW

Administrator Lydia Wilson, Whittlesea City Council, VIC