

Premier's Economic Social Recovery Advisory Council Interim Report *Volunteering Tasmania Synopsis*

The Premier's Economic Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESRAC) was set up to give the State Government recommendations on the COVID-19 recovery and rebuild for Tasmania. The Interim Report sets out the impacts of COVID-19 on Tasmania's economy and people and includes 64 recommendations. The full report is available here: <https://www.pesrac.tas.gov.au/reports>

In a nutshell, the Report says the main economic challenges are the need to stimulate demand, create jobs and draw people back into the labour force, while helping people to upskill and reskill. The social impacts are placing pressure on government and community sectors as they try to plan, prepare and respond to issues and increases in demand for supports.

Tasmanians want to see the economy start up again and jobs return, as well as finding ways to improve everyone's wellbeing.

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

COVID-19 suppression measures have had a substantial impact on the economy through a drop in demand. This has been caused by lockdown and physical distancing measures, households spending less, businesses closing, supply chain issues and people losing their jobs.

Community service organisations are also experiencing uncertain revenue streams and increased demand for services. Many organisations are finding it difficult to

attract and retain volunteers. Around 70 per cent of volunteer programs have been suspended and about 250 000 volunteer hours have stopped being delivered every week.

Job losses

Between March and May 2020, 19200 Tasmanians lost their job. The unemployment rate increased 1.4 percentage points to 6.4 per cent. About 85 per cent of people who have lost their employment in Tasmania since March have left the labour force.

While total employment in Tasmania fell by 7.4 per cent from March to May, nearly one-in-five Tasmanians aged 15-24 lost their employment. Between March and May, female employment in Tasmania fell by 8 per cent while male employment fell by 6.9 per cent. Between February and May 2020, 58 per cent of all employment losses nationally were in accommodation and food services, arts and recreation services, and education and training. Almost all local government areas have experienced greater than a 50 per cent increase in the number of people looking for work and using employment services.

SOCIAL IMPACTS

There is no reliable data yet on the social impacts of COVID-19. However the report notes in general that sudden and dramatic changes in people's financial position have resulted in increased demand for social supports such as food relief and emergency housing.

Mental health: The sudden impacts, as well as isolation, loneliness, uncertainty, anxiety and a loss of purpose, have driven increases in those seeking support for mental health. Service providers have reported that 67 per cent of those seeking support for psychological distress are new clients.

Security: Many Tasmanians are being hit by rental or mortgage stress for the first time. There has been an increase in people seeking emergency accommodation, particularly women and young people. Temporary visa holders, students and those receiving disability supports have also been among those seeking food relief and housing support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Report includes relevant recommendations about communication, funding, regional impacts and social impacts. The recommendations that relate specifically to volunteers and volunteering are:

- **33.** The State Government should engage with Volunteering Tasmania to develop support measures to enable organisations to retain and attract volunteers; and
- **34.** Workplace Standards should make special efforts, including by providing simple templates, to assist volunteer-based organisations develop COVID-19 Safety Plans.

ADVOCACY

Through targeted advocacy Volunteering Tasmania will continue to promote:

- the economic contribution made by volunteers to sectors of our economy, and the inclusion of volunteering in regional-based and relevant sector-based responses; and
- volunteering as a solution for rising social isolation and loneliness, as well as volunteering and participation as a key strategy for building connected and resilient communities.

There are also opportunities for volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) to advocate on a number of recommendations, including:

- Funding certainty through more flexible, longer term contracts with government that support innovation and collaboration.
- A strategic approach to the sustainability of volunteering in sector-based strategies, region-based solutions and for skills development.
- Coherent messaging and information from government about COVID-safe requirements.
- Improved access to digital technology for VIOs, especially for smaller organisations, and helping organisations to transition to digital and online platforms.
- Implement place-based, community-led approaches to Tasmania's recovery so that local people can lead transformative, inclusive change for the State.