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Steps the ATO is taking through COVID-19 to help Australian taxpayers

The ATO has committed to implement a series of administrative steps to help Australian taxpayers who will go through financial difficulty as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Commissioner Chris Jordan is encouraging businesses affected by the coronavirus to get in touch with the ATO to discuss relief options. “We know that many businesses and communities are being heavily affected by the challenging economic conditions created by the outbreak of COVID-19,” he said.

“The ATO will work shoulder-to-shoulder with businesses to assist them through this difficult period and do what we can to ease the pressure. Once you contact us, we’ll tailor a support plan for your needs and circumstances,” Jordan said.

“Support measures could include deferral of some payments, quicker access to GST refunds, and options to enter low interest payment plans for existing or future tax debts.”

The ATO flags that it understands this is a time of significant uncertainty, and that it realises it will need to be flexible in how it helps out businesses. It reminds that the following options available to assist businesses impacted by COVID-19. Steps include:

- *Deferring by up to six months the payment date of amounts due through a BAS (including PAYG instalments), income tax assessments, fringe benefits tax assessments and excise*

- *Allow businesses on a quarterly reporting cycle to opt into monthly GST reporting in order to get quicker access to GST refunds they may be entitled to*
- *Allowing businesses to vary Pay As You Go (PAYG) instalment amounts to zero for the March 2020 quarter. Businesses that vary their PAYG instalment to zero can also claim a refund for any instalments made for the September 2019 and December 2019 quarters*
- *Remitting any interest and penalties, incurred on or after 23 January 2020, that have been applied to tax liabilities*
- *The ATO will work with affected businesses to help them pay their existing and ongoing tax liabilities by allowing them to enter into low interest payment plans.*

Employers will still need to meet their ongoing SG obligations for their employees.

To make it easier for people to apply for relief, the ATO will be increasing its presence in the areas of highest impact. It says a temporary shopfront with staff specialising in assisting small business will be established in Cairns within the next few weeks. In addition, it is looking at the ways it can enhance its presence in other significantly affected regions, making it easier for people to apply for relief. Additional temporary shopfronts and face-to-face options are currently under consideration.

The ATO will also continue to work with the tax profession, other government agencies and local organisations to make sure other affected communities are also supported during this time. It says it will “ensure its services are tailored to the needs of the community and will work with taxpayers and their tax agents to tailor support to their individual circumstances”.

Outside of business, the ATO will also work with individuals experiencing financial hardship, and their tax agents, and will apply appropriate tax relief measures for serious and exceptional circumstances, such as where people cannot pay for food or accommodation.

Unlike the bushfire relief measures, which applied automatically to particular geographic areas, assistance measures for those impacted by COVID-19 will not be automatically implemented.

Anyone impacted by COVID-19 is advised to contact the ATO to request assistance on its Emergency Support Infoline **1800 806 218**, when they are ready, to discuss their situation.

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