

14 October 2020, via email
The Hon. Daniel Andrews MP

Dear Premier,

The Council of Small Business Organisations Australia (COSBOA) is the national peak body representing the interests of small business. Collectively, COSBOA's members represent an estimated 1.3 million of the 2.5 million small and family businesses that operate in Australia – around 30% of which operate in the state of Victoria.

We are deeply concerned that the continuation of the Melbourne COVID-19 lockdown beyond 19 October 2020 will create a cycle of poverty and unemployment in Victoria. This impact will take many years to overcome and will mainly affect the most disadvantaged in the community, including entire families.

The current situation cannot be endured any longer. Businesses need a hard reopening date, as opposed to waiting until COVID-19 case numbers reach a theoretical daily infection rate threshold that has been developed by computer models that do not take into account the associated adverse economic and human impacts.

Most importantly, failure to implement a staged reopening of the Victorian economy from this Sunday will result in many small and family businesses in Victoria being forced to close their doors permanently - even before the Christmas trading season begins. Retail and hospitality businesses all over Melbourne will close permanently if they cannot trade in November and December. Cafes will close their doors permanently, resulting in school leavers being unable to secure summer holiday employment. Entertainment businesses will cease to exist, and Victorian artists and entertainers will need to relocate permanently to other states. Businesses that have been holding on by their fingernails in sectors such as hair and beauty will have no choice but to shut shop.

We believe that severe economic and social harm will come from chasing the marginal reduction in health risk that comes with further extensions of the lockdown of Melbourne – to say nothing of the harm that has already been caused in this regard.

Victorian small business owners, and indeed all Victorians, supported the lockdown on the basis that COVID-19 infections were increasing exponentially at the time and that the lockdown was needed to reduce the infection rate. The lockdown also afforded an opportunity for the Victorian Government to improve its contact tracing capability. Now, after more than 100 days, the lockdown has significantly reduced infections, case numbers have stabilised at a low level, and the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services has been given more than enough time to introduce rigorous contact tracing.

It is now time for Victoria to reopen. Victorians must be allowed to live (and do business) with the virus instead of being locked away in their homes.

We have a plan for safe staged re-opening of businesses from 19 October. Our plan minimises COVID contagion risk while simultaneously allowing small and family business owners to set

about rebuilding jobs and their own livelihoods. The fact is that most industry sectors associated with small business members are already prepared to open safely.

Our recommendations are not about putting 'profits before health'. The current low rate of COVID-19 transmission means that we can choose to chase a perfect health outcome in lockdown, or to open with new rules and processes until the pandemic is over.

Our plan will minimise economic damage. We seek a meeting with you to discuss our plan to get Victoria moving again in a COVID-safe way.

Yours sincerely,



Mark McKenzie, Chair



Peter Strong, CEO



