

Questions taken on notice and further information agreed to be supplied at the hearings

Portfolio:	Premier
Witness:	Premier
Committee member:	Mr Hibbins
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Question:

Mr HIBBINS: Well, that is the case, Premier. We have been contacted by a number of renters where landlords have been unresponsive, offering deferrals rather than reductions, excessive personal information being requested, which really points to the problem of good-faith negotiations. It works well when you have got both parties acting in good faith, but when you have got such a significant power imbalance that can often be not the case.

Can I ask: do you have details in terms of just how many rent agreements have actually been registered at this time?

Answer:

As of 11 May 2020, 6,813 reduced rent agreements have been lodged with Consumer Affairs Victoria.

Question:

Mr HIBBINS: Thank you, Chair, and I was looking for information **regarding how many times the dispute settlement centre and dispute resolution services have been accessed.** I will put them on notice, but just to confirm that neither of the secretaries have that information on hand either?

Answer:

The Chief Dispute Resolution Officer's power to accept referred disputes relating to residential tenancies from the Director, Consumer Affairs Victoria is effective from 12 May 2020. As of 12 May 2020, Consumer Affairs Victoria has referred 216 matters to the Dispute Settlement Centre Victoria for specialised mediation.

Question:

Mr HIBBINS: All right. Well, I am looking **for information around the average time it takes for a resolution, the average amount of rent reduction, the number of binding orders from the chief dispute officer that have been issued and the time it has taken for the binding orders to be made.**

Answer:

As of 12 May 2020, no binding orders have been made. The Chief Dispute Resolution Officer's power to accept referred disputes relating to residential tenancies from the Director, Consumer Affairs Victoria is effective from 12 May 2020.

As of 11 May 2020, 1,269 matters have been resolved by Consumer Affairs Victoria's frontline resolution team, taking an average 6.4 calendar days to resolve.

As of 11 May 2020, the average weekly rent decrease for agreements lodged with Consumer Affairs Victoria was 31 per cent.

Question:

Mr HIBBINS: Great, thank you. We will see what we can get out of the PAEC hearings. Do you have information in terms of the rent relief payments? That was, I think, payments of up to \$2000. That works out to be \$80 a week. **How much of that has actually been expended so far?**

Answer:

As of 11 May 2020, no payments have been made. This is due to the need for reduced rental agreements to be lodged with Consumer Affairs Victoria prior to applying for the rent relief scheme, and the need for the Department of Health and Human Services to obtain further information from applicants to assess the application. Payments are expected to begin to flow to applicants the week beginning 18 May, once eligibility checks and authorisations have been completed.

Question:

Mr HIBBINS: Well, if we could get data around **just how many [rent relief] payments have been paid and the average size of the payment**, that would be helpful to the Committee. Thank you.

Answer:

As of 11 May 2020, no payments have been made. This is due to the need for reduced rental agreements to be lodged with Consumer Affairs Victoria prior to applying for the rent relief scheme, and the need for the Department of Health and Human Services to obtain further information from applicants to assess the application. As of 11 May 2020, 3144 applications have been received.

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Portfolio:	Premier
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Committee member:	Mr O'BRIEN
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Question:

Mr O'BRIEN: Can I quickly ask on notice that if you do **have any mental health advice [on impact of restrictions] that was prepared**, it be provided to the committee, please.

Answer:

The Victorian Government has carefully considered the physical and mental health of all Victorians when developing its restrictions to combat the serious public health risk posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This is why the government developed the *Keeping Victorians Connected and Supported: Mental Health and Wellbeing COVID-19 Response Package*, in consultation with mental health experts and the sector.

The \$59.4 million package will support the mental health, wellbeing and social connectedness of Victorians impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions to stop COVID-19 transmission in the community.

This funding includes \$17.8 million to begin the first phase of the roll out of 170 extra youth and adult acute mental health beds – a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System interim report.

The government also recently announced an additional \$19.5 million to further deliver essential reform recommendations from the Royal Commission and help flatten a potential wave of mental ill health resulting from COVID-19 pandemic.

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Portfolio:	Premier
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Committee member:	Mr LIMBRICK
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Question:

Mr LIMBRICK: It is my understanding that a number of defence personnel were assigned to contact tracing. Could you please describe how those personnel have actually been used in contact tracing?

Mr ANDREWS: I am more than happy to try and get some information about exactly **how much work the ADF has done for us.**

Answer:

Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel have supported State Control Centre functions with:

- mortuary and body management planning
- logistics planning (supplies and consumables)
- COVID-19 testing site planning
- Operation Soteria (mandatory hotel quarantine planning) and
- state strategic and consequence management planning.

In addition, ADF personnel have supported the Case and Contact Tracing Team of the Department of Health and Human Services. The ADF personnel assisted in two capacities:

- triage and notification—receiving calls to the 1300 communicable diseases numbers, which includes notifications of coronavirus cases and enquiries from medical practitioners, health services and known close contacts and confirmed cases, and
- operational coordination functions such as floor management and implementing physical distancing measurements.

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Portfolio:	Premier
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Committee member:	Mr LIMBRICK
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Question:

Mr LIMBRICK: I do not have much time left, but one point was—you brought up New York, Paris and London, these other cities that have had terrible responses, and yet some other cities such as Bangkok, Baghdad and New Delhi have not really suffered great problems with the pandemic. **How can we be sure that our actions are effective as compared to these other cities, because it does not seem very clear in all cases?**

Answer:

The Victorian Government's actions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have been underpinned by advice from Victoria's Chief Health Officer (CHO), the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee and the National Cabinet. This advice is informed by many factors including best practice for pandemic responses, consideration of the latest scientific evidence and epidemiological literature, and learning from responses and public health outcomes in other countries.

International jurisdictions have taken different approaches in response to the pandemic with varying public health outcomes for their populations. While it is not yet possible to correlate a jurisdiction's 'success' with specific interventions, we can observe from the evidence available that Victoria's response to date has been successful in containing the number of cases and deaths from COVID-19.

The level of Victoria's restrictions has been similar to most other jurisdictions, and Australia has had among the lowest number of cases and deaths per million population and very high comparative testing per million population.

To continue this positive trend, Victoria has significantly increased testing and contact tracing programs. This enables the state to identify outbreaks and respond early, mitigating the risk of a large-scale outbreak as seen in many other countries such as the United States and Italy, or reintroduction of restrictions due to a spike in cases such as recently in South Korea and Singapore. Continued monitoring of COVID-19 transmission in the state's population and advice from the CHO will remain imperative to future decisions about easing of restrictions.

The speed and progress of the virus globally, as well as the different variables within jurisdictions, means that waiting to learn from others would have been at the cost of Victorians' lives and wellbeing. As we have done to date, we will continue to incorporate intervention evidence at a state and national level as it emerges.

We know there will be many lessons learnt from the current situation all over the world. These lessons are becoming all the more important as we continue to adapt our response to balance individual liberties with positive public health outcomes and will also help inform any future response. Many cities have seen significant increases in transmission resulting from efforts to ease restrictions in a controlled manner, and Victoria will continue to monitor the international experience going forwards.

We are confident that the actions taken in Victoria in response to the pandemic continue to be appropriate and proportionate to the Victorian context. The actions to date have contributed to the low number of cases and deaths compared to other jurisdictions internationally and compared to initial modelling for the state’s population, and that will always remain the priority for this government.

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Portfolio:	Premier
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Committee member:	Ms VALLENCE
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Question:

Ms VALLENCE: All right. What we would ask on notice as well is if you can provide a line-by-line breakdown to the Committee of **expenditure that has so far been expended by the Department of Premier and Cabinet through this coronavirus pandemic, since its onset**—if you could you provide that to the Committee and also provide that to the Committee during the course of these hearings?

Answer:

Expenditure will be published in Annual Reports, which will be tabled in Parliament.