

### **Income Insurance Scheme floated**

An income insurance scheme will better protect workers and incomes, increase the availability of skilled workers and help communities and industries during economic shocks and transitions, Minister of Finance [Grant Robertson says](#).

Consultation is now open (until 26 April 2022) on the proposed New Zealand Income Insurance Scheme, jointly designed Government, Business New Zealand and the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, which would see workers made redundant, laid off, or who have to stop working because of a health condition or disability, receive 80 percent of their usual salary for up to seven months, up to the current ACC cap. The proposal includes up to twelve months of support for re-training.

Grant Robertson said such a scheme was an enduring solution that would protect people and the economy after job losses, like those seen after crises like the Canterbury earthquakes and COVID-19.

“As New Zealand moves beyond the economic and social impacts of COVID-19, there are important lessons to be learned from the way we were able to support one another through an unprecedented series of challenges.

“During COVID-19, the Government protected livelihoods with the Wage Subsidy Scheme and Resurgence Support Payment. This was primarily done through keeping people in their existing jobs and supporting businesses most directly affected by the pandemic.

“We think it’s time for an enduring solution. Business NZ and the CTU jointly approached the government about this work, and we have progressed it through our tripartite Future of Work Forum. A range of Ministers and departments have contributed to the proposals alongside our social partners.

“Our proposed scheme provides economic security to individuals directly, and supports them to transition into a good, new job, as opposed to economic support packages which keep people in their existing job even if that role is no longer viable,” Grant Robertson said.

The key features of the proposed New Zealand Income Insurance Scheme are:

- Broad coverage for different working arrangements
- Coverage for job losses due to redundancy, layoffs and health conditions and disabilities

- A four-week notice period and four-week payment, at 80 percent of salary, from employers
- A further six months of financial support from the scheme, including support for training at 80 percent of wages or a salary
- A case management service to support people's return to work
- Administered by ACC
- Funded by levies on wages and salaries, with both workers and employers paying an estimated 1.39 percent each
- Workers eligible after six months of levy contributions in the previous 18 months.

The proposals are available at [www.mbie.govt.nz/incomeinsurance](http://www.mbie.govt.nz/incomeinsurance). You can either complete a short survey or make a submission. Consultation closes on 26 April 2022.

### **New close contact exemption scheme for critical supply chains**

- New exemption scheme established to keep critical supply chains running
- Close contacts can keep going to work instead of isolating if they return a negative rapid antigen test
- Businesses will self-assess against criteria to join scheme
- Close contacts who work alone can operate in a bubble of one

A new close contact exemption scheme will help keep critical supply chains running though Omicron, COVID-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins and Associate Minister of Health Dr Ayesha Verrall have [announced](#).

"The Government has for weeks been working with industry bodies and critical services to set up a workable scheme that gives their workers an exemption from close contact isolation requirements, if they return daily negative tests.

"The scheme will be supported by rapid antigen tests supplied either directly by the business or service, or through our health system in an easy and accessible way."

From 10 February 2022, businesses and organisations can register online as a critical service if they think they will meet the criteria when we enter Phase 2. Registration includes a declaration and will be able to be checked.

Critical services include food production and its supply chain, key public services like health and emergency services, lifeline utilities such as power and water supplies, transport, critical financial services, news media and social welfare. It also includes human and animal health and welfare.

“It is up to businesses to self-assess and decide if they want to participate in the scheme. In doing so there needs to be an awareness that bringing close contacts into the workplace will come with risks,” Dr Ayesha Verrall said.

In other words, there are two options for worker exemptions from isolation requirements during Phases Two and Three of the Omicron strategy:

- Bubble of one
- The Close Contact Exemption Scheme

More information [here](#).

### **How to register as a Critical Service**

Businesses and organisations can self-assess whether they meet the criteria and, and if so, register [here](#).

### **Key things to consider**

Given the risk of transmission from a close contact, businesses should be careful about the extent they use the scheme, as a COVID-19 case at work could result in greater absenteeism in the future.

Key things for businesses to consider are:

- Does the worker need to be onsite (can they self-isolate and work remotely)?
- Does the worker either have key skills or are they needed onsite in order to maintain minimum operations/capacity?
- Is your business a critical service (noting that workers at businesses that are not critical services can only access 'bubble of one')?
- If your business is a critical service, can the worker self-isolate or be in a 'bubble of one' (noting that Rapid Antigen Tests are only 80% accurate, so a returning worker who is not in a bubble away from other workers risks bringing COVID-19 into the workplace)?
- What other appropriate steps can you take to limit the risk of transmission if a worker returns onsite?
- Can you meet Health and Safety Act requirements to maintain a safe operating environment in the workplace while you have a close contact onsite?
- Do you have business continuity plans in place for if a worker who is a close contact tests positive and needs to isolate?

### **Workers notified that they are close contacts should...**

When a worker at a critical service is notified that they are a close contact of a COVID-19 case, they will need to contact the business they work at to let them know.

For the worker to access Rapid Antigen Tests, the business must send the worker two documents:

- A copy of the letter the business received from the Critical Services Register, which records that they have declared themselves as a critical service and contains a unique identifier for that business
- A critical worker authorisation letter, which must include:
  - a declaration that the business and worker are critical, with a rationale (businesses may include the output of the self-assessment tool)
  - an outline of the protocols the worker will need to follow to mitigate transmission risks
  - the business's unique identifier from the Critical Services Register letter
  - the worker's workplace identification (if they have one).

The worker will then need to collect a Rapid Antigen Test kit from a Ministry of Health distribution hub. If a business has a private supply of Rapid Antigen Tests, they can opt to supply a critical worker with these instead.

The business should still write and send the worker the critical worker authorisation letter, as this is evidence that the worker has an exemption from their self-isolation requirements for the purposes of working.

The process for workers to follow is [here](#).

Source [MBIE](#)

### **Rapid Antigen Tests**

Rapid Antigen Tests are COVID-19 tests that give a result much more quickly (often within 20 minutes), than the PCR tests that are currently used nationwide. However, Rapid Antigen Tests are less sensitive at detecting cases than a PCR test.

More information [here](#).

### **Minimum wage increases 1 April 2022**

A reminder that the minimum wage increases to \$21.20 per hour from 1 April 2022. The starting-out and training minimum wage will also increase to \$16.96 per hour from that date.

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