

Mental health and wellbeing tools now available to small businesses

- The Government is extending its health and wellness support package, which was successfully implemented in Auckland last year, to small businesses across New Zealand until June 2024.
- The First Steps platform has had over 70,000 Auckland-based users reporting positive results.
- First steps was funded within the Government's 2021 \$60 million package for Regional Business Partner Programme and mental health support.

"The last couple of years have been extremely difficult for small businesses in New Zealand, and I'm very pleased that the '[First Steps](#)' programme will now be available to those outside the Auckland region, providing mental health and wellness resources tailored to businesses," Small Business Minister Stuart Nash announced on 14 October 2022.

"We've heard from small business owners and employees that operating throughout the pandemic has resulted in increased feelings of stress and isolation, which has had significant negative impacts on mental wellbeing. First Steps offers preventative support for business owners, managers, and employees that aims to reduce the number of those in crisis by providing a variety of tools, resources, and perspectives.

"There are an estimated 546,000 small businesses here in New Zealand and up to 1.2 million individuals who are owners or employees. Rolling out First Steps across the country will mean that they all get access to Government-funded mental health and wellbeing tools to support them as they recover from the pandemic" Stuart Nash said.

Rural Communities Minister Damien O'Connor says that the step will be important across the provinces. "Rural communities are a fabric woven together by small businesses. It's important when it is needed by individuals, that help with mental health is available because it helps with rural resilience."

Source: [Beehive](#)

Key visa categories reopened

- Skilled Migrant Category resumed under current settings
- First selection at 160 points
- Consultation commenced on proposed new system to future proof the category.

The Government has announced the resumption of selections for two residence visa categories visas. Immigration Minister Michael Wood announced the changes at a speech to business and migrant community leaders in Auckland on 12 October 2022.

"As the world recovers from COVID-19, labour shortages continue to be a global symptom," Michael Wood said. "We are listening closely to the concerns of businesses, many of whom have approval to hire migrants but are finding it difficult to recruit internationally in a constrained labour market. Today's changes work in tandem with the immigration changes already made and will help further relieve labour shortages and ensure a competitive edge to attract talent to New Zealand.

"We are resuming the Skilled Migrant Category under the current settings to help attract more workers. The first selection will be at 160 points, and subsequent selections at an increased threshold of 180 points, to better align with the future direction of the category and our rebalance goals. Getting the long-term settings of the category right is important for New Zealand's future economic security and ensuring that we can attract and retain high skilled

talent. At the same time as resuming selections, we are commencing consultation on a proposed new system that will future proof the category and will further complement the new Green List and Highly Paid residence pathways.

“The previous system restricted the number applications which were progressed through a planning range, which meant that only 40% of SMC applications were processed in 2019. Our proposed changes, include removing the planning range, so that all applications that meet the criteria will be processed. It will also include a more simplified points system, will set a clear, fair and transparent eligibility threshold and offer several ways for people to demonstrate their skill” level Michael Wood said.

Further information at the links below:

- [Future of the Skilled Migrant Category Consultation](#)
- [Skilled Migrant Category reopening](#)
- [Parent Category](#)

Source: [Beehive](#)

Changes proposed to ACC’s Accredited Employers Programme

- New health and safety assessments
- Strengthening claims and injury management assessments
- New performance monitoring model
- Increased flexibility to choose a claims management period

The Government is consulting on changes to the ACC Accredited Employers Programme (AEP).

“AEP plays an important role, enabling large employers to ‘stand in the shoes’ of ACC when dealing with workplace injury claims and rehabilitation in return for a reduction in their ACC levy,” Minister for ACC Carmel Sepuloni said.

“At its best, AEP enables employers to provide a better experience for injured workers and support them to recover fully from their injuries and return to good work. Over time however, it’s become clear that stronger measures are needed so that all employees have this experience,” Carmel Sepuloni said.

“The consultation aims to help us strengthen the programme by ensuring employers are held to account and injured workers are better supported.

“This package of four proposals aims to tighten the standards, monitoring of Accredited Employers, performance rating and improve worker experience. The proposals underline the need for us to get the settings right, and strike the right balance between the welfare of workers with the compliance burden and cost to employers” Carmel Sepuloni said.

Consultation on the proposed changes opened on 11 October 2022 and closes on 6 November 2022. [Click here](#) to have your say.

Source: [Beehive](#)

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