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## Government's plan for the unemployed, face masks in Red, arrests and much more...

### Government's Unemployment Insurance Plan!

By Shazreen Hussain

Incidents such as the current COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters like the Canterbury earthquake have caused extensive job losses and witnessed profitable businesses close. Such economic challenges have the prospect to become more common, with technology evolving and replacing people in jobs. The move to an energy-efficient economy will see major changes in how we do things, and some trades, such as oil and gas, will be replaced by others at some point.

In New Zealand, every year, more than 100,000 workers lose their jobs. A new ACC-style unemployment insurance scheme has been designed by the Government, Business New Zealand, and the Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU) to help workers. The scheme would basically cover workers who are made redundant, laid off, or when a health condition or disability substantially affects their working hours.



Workers who lose their job would be paid up to 80 percent of their wage for up to seven months under this proposed state-run income insurance scheme. The scheme will give workers the time and financial security to find a good job that matches their skill set, aspirations, and needs, or take part in rehabilitation or training for a new, satisfying career.

The Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) would manage the scheme and would be paid for by levies on wages and salaries, with workers and employers contributing an estimated 1.39 percent each. Finance Minister Grant Robertson has already announced the details of the proposal, which the Government is seeking feedback on. Submissions for the income

insurance schemes are due at 5 pm on 26 April 2022. Robertson said there were important lessons to be learned from the impacts of Covid-19, and the value of the Wage Subsidy and Resurgence Support Payment schemes. "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," Robertson said.

An employer will be required to provide an employee with four weeks' notice, plus a further four weeks' pay at 80% after the job ends, after which the scheme kicks in for up to six months. Applicants applying for the insurance scheme would be required to look for work or actively take part in training and rehabilitation opportunities.

#### Eligibility criteria:

- Workers would be eligible after having made six months of contributions within the last 18 months.
- Parental leave is covered.
- Fixed term and seasonal work are covered up until the original end date of work.
- Casual workers who can show a reasonable expectation of future income will be considered permanent workers.
- Workers employed in multiple jobs are eligible if they lose a job that provides more than 20% of their income.
- Feedback is currently being sought on coverage for contractors and self-employed people.
- Workers subject to health and/or disability-related job losses will be eligible.

Richard Wagstaff (NZCTU President) said such a scheme would act as a financial cushion for the nearly 100,000 Kiwi workers who lose jobs each year through no fault of their own.



Over the last 40 years, widespread job losses have occurred all too frequently, and the COVID-19 outbreak is an obvious example,

Wagstaff said. "Finding a good job takes time. Many people accept lower-paid jobs that don't match their skill set because of the financial pressure to get back to work quickly."

#### Wearing Face Masks In 'Red'

The new requirements for wearing face masks whilst in the 'Red' COVID-19 Framework setting, came into force at 11:59pm on 3 February 2022. Outlined below are key changes to take note of:

- Face coverings need to be an actual mask (bandannas, scarves, and t-shirts are no longer acceptable).
- Workers who are mandated to be vaccinated such as health care workers and teachers must wear a medical mask - such as the blue surgical masks which are commonly used.
- Masks must be worn at food and drink businesses, close proximity businesses, events, and gatherings. Masks can only be taken off in these areas to eat, drink or exercise.
- Children, from Years 4 and up, must wear masks on public transport, including school buses.



#### Considerations for an employer:

- Whether any workplace policies should be updated or even designed to line up with the new requirements.
- Whether the place of work has a good supply of face masks.
- Whether employees know how to safely wear face masks, and for how long before it needs replacing.
- Whether staff need training on how to deal with difficult clients/customers who deny following the rules.
- Whether any chemists in the area sell face masks locally in case of a shortage at the workplace.
- Whether any employees are exempt from wearing a facemask. If any employee is exempt, it must be considered how the employer will request and store information about an exempt employee bearing in mind

the employer's obligations under the Privacy Act 2020.

### Minimum Wage Increase



The Government has confirmed an increase of \$1.20, in the minimum wage rate, bringing it to \$21.20 per hour from 1 April 2022. Likewise, the training and the starting-out minimum wage will increase from \$16 to \$16.96 per hour. Michael Wood (Minister for Workplace Relations and Safety) confirmed the changes in a statement on 11 February 2022. Wood said the move will directly help about 300,000 employees, and help families affected by COVID-19.

"For someone working a 40-hour week on the minimum wage, this increase will see them earning an extra \$48 a week, and almost \$2500 more each year," he said. Wood said the Government was delivering on an election pledge with the move and remained devoted to assisting employees and employers throughout the Omicron pandemic. "The wage increase will also have a stimulatory effect on the economy as many workers will spend the extra money on goods and services, which in turn, will help support businesses," Wood said.

In September 2021, the Living Wage (the rate at which a citizen would need to afford life necessities) increased to \$22.75. This increase comes after inflation hit its highest since mid-1990 increasing to 1.4 percent, taking the annual rate to 5.9 percent.

### Opposition's reaction:

Simon Bridges (National Party) said the minimum wage increase was an admission by Government that there is a cost-of-living crisis. "It's no coincidence the increase is 6 percent - almost exactly the same as inflation over the last 12 months," he said. "Despite this huge increase, those receiving it will be no better off than they were a year ago. And it's cold comfort to millions of other Kiwis who are also being hurt by cost-of-living pressure."

Bridges said the increase would be extremely hard for many businesses who were already battling financial pressure. "National knows that what New Zealanders need doesn't come from the flick of a pen on minimum wage but from an agenda to lift growth and productivity," he said.

David Seymour (ACT) said the minimum wage increase went against the advice of the Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment (MBIE), which advised the

move would constrain employment growth. Seymour said this move would mean that most businesses would raise their prices or even close, which would mean more people will be on unemployment benefit which the Government cannot afford. He stated that the Government that any stimulatory impact on the economy was not likely because of the fairly low proportion of minimum wage workers in New Zealand.

### Man Arrested in Wellington Attempting to Receive 8th Booster!

A man has been caught in a Wellington Covid-19 vaccination clinic attempting to receive an eighth COVID-19 booster vaccine. The man was stopped by staff at the Johnsonville Mall vaccination clinic on Wednesday afternoon.

A spokesperson from the Ministry of Health reported to Newshub that the man's actions basically placed himself and other people at risk. "People who have had more vaccine doses than recommended should seek clinical advice as soon as practicable. Having an inaccurate vaccination status not only puts you at risk, but it also puts your friends, whānau, and the community at risk, and the healthcare teams that treat you now and in the future." The spokesperson said getting a COVID-19 jab on behalf of another person will result in incorrect medical records.

"To assume another person's identity and receive medical treatment is dangerous. This puts at risk the person who receives a vaccination under an assumed identity and the person whose health record will show they have been vaccinated when they have not," said the spokesperson.

In addition to this, the spokesperson stated that if an individual was to receive vaccination under an assumed identity their own medical health track record would not reflect that they were vaccinated which could affect their health management in the future. The spokesperson further added that medical practitioners work in a high trust setting and usually have faith in people to act in good faith and share correct information when it comes to treatment.

At present, the Capital and Coast District Health Board told, and the police are investigating this incident. However, this is not the first time someone has received a COVID-19 vaccine on behalf of another person. In December 2021, an investigation was launched by the police after a man received 10 COVID-19 vaccinations within 24 hours and was paid to get vaccines on behalf of others.

### Will the Parliament Protest Risk an Omicron Outbreak?

On Tuesday, more than 1000 protesters arrived at Parliament from all over New

Zealand. Since then, hundreds have camped on Parliament grounds, while some returned



each day to continue the anti-vaccine, anti-mandate, anti-government protest known as Convoy 2022. Professor Michael Baker (Epidemiologist, University of Otago) said the ongoing protest where hundreds of people have been sharing tents, cooking facilities, and portable toilets, posed a public health risk. "It could easily infect a large number of people who could get very sick, and wind up in hospital. That's sad for them and puts an unnecessary strain on the health system."

In January, we witnessed a similar issue when dozens of people who attended Soundsplash were infected. About 6000 people attended the multi-day Waikato music festival. Baker said, similar protests offshore, including an anti-vaccine motorcycle rally in America, had become "superspreader events."

Baker expressed that the attitudes of protesters, who were doing "the opposite of everything you could do to limit transmission", meant it would be hard to reduce any probable protest outbreak. He added that the rate of COVID-19 in the community, with more than 440 cases confirmed on 11 February 2022, meant there was a "moderate" chance that people who arrived at the protest were infected. "There is a lot of shouting, singing, and people getting quite agitated. They will generate more infectious aerosols," Baker said.

Epidemiologist Rod Jackson agreed. He said it would be "very surprising" if COVID-19 wasn't spreading among the protesters on Parliament grounds and their protest risked becoming a superspreader event. Jackson added that it is highly likely for some protesters to have COVID-19 considering the current state of the outbreak. Both Baker and Jackson said the everyday case totals would underrate the true number of people who currently had COVID. They also stated that New Zealand's high vaccination rate meant many people could have COVID-19, but only minor symptoms which they may not identify as an issue.

### Resources

- Ministry of Health ([www.health.govt.nz](http://www.health.govt.nz))
- Work and Income ([www.workandincome.govt.nz](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz))
- Covid-19 Official Site ([www.covid19.govt.nz](http://www.covid19.govt.nz))
- Newshub Official Site ([www.newshub.co.nz](http://www.newshub.co.nz))



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