

AEU NT Member Bulletin 1/2020

16 March 2020

Special bulletin – update on COVID19

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COVID19 update

All members will be aware of the impact of COVID19 on schools and the wider community. The AEU NT realises many of you have questions about what this means for you and your work. As this is a rapidly evolving situation, the best thing you can do is pay careful attention to updates provided by the Chief Executive and principals. All government agencies are acting on advice from health authorities and we urge you to do the same. Community safety is the number one priority right now, and each of us has an important role to play in controlling the spread of the virus.

The AEU NT is being updated regularly by senior officers from the Department of Education (DoE) and the Commissioner for Public Employment on arrangements being put in place for schools and NTPS employees. There is currently no plan to close schools in the NT. However, we understand that the matter of schools will be on the agenda at tomorrow's National Cabinet meeting, at which the NT is represented. Furthermore, DoE is finalising a pandemic plan that includes contingencies for school closures.

The AEU and other public sector unions continue to advocate to protect the employment conditions of all members. As a result of urging by unions, the Commissioner has approved special leave of up to two weeks for those employees required to self-isolate in some circumstances (where those employees cannot work from home).

We are continuing to seek a guarantee that if you contract COVID19 or are caring for someone with the virus, additional leave will be made available if you run out of personal leave credits. Discussions are continuing with a focus on protecting members' employment conditions and ensuring you continue to be paid as normal, with access to the appropriate form of paid leave.

Another issue to consider is the Australian Government's decision that anyone arriving in Australia henceforth will be required to self-isolate for 14 days. This may affect you if you have already made plans to travel overseas in the coming school holiday period. We will discuss this matter further with the Commissioner and DoE, but advise that members who have booked to travel overseas during the coming school holiday break should reconsider, as you will be required to remain in self-isolation for two weeks upon your return.

There are also potential consequences to consider for remote members about decisions being made to try to isolate remote communities to stop the spread of the virus to vulnerable populations. This is sensible health policy but we recognise that most members in remote settings will be planning to leave their communities during the upcoming school holiday period. Again, we have raised this matter with the Department and are assured it is being carefully considered.

We note that during this period, the Department has provided the AEU NT with up-to-date information on processes the Department is undertaking in conjunction with health and other agencies, including reports of operational and system matters as they develop. We will continue to keep members updated as best we can,

and we encourage you to contact our office via phone or email if you have questions or require specific advice.

We acknowledge this is a rapidly changing situation and that it may be a stressful time for many. Please look out for one another.

Branch Conference postponed

Due to the current uncertainty, our Executive last Friday decided to postpone this year's Branch Conference, which was due to take place in Darwin on 1-3 May. Executive will reassess the situation in June. Depending on developments we hope to reschedule Conference for later in the year.

Union office – support available as usual

Our Branch Office remains open as normal. However, as a precaution, we have cancelled all remote travel and workplace visits until the end of the term. We are still very much available to assist members and sub-branches, including with "virtual visits", meaning AEU officers can phone in to sub-branch meetings if requested to provide advice. You can also phone or email us as normal with any queries.

Please let us know ASAP if your workplace, contact details or income have changed

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