

# COVID-19: Statement by the Presiding Officers updating changes to Parliament House operations

Joint statement from the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Hon Tony Smith MP and the President of the Senate, Senator the Hon Scott Ryan

5 June 2020

On 16 March 2020 we advised of temporary and precautionary changes implemented as part of pandemic planning measures regarding the operations of Australian Parliament House (APH). These measures can now be adapted to the changing restrictions on public gatherings. Some restrictions will need to remain in place, but operations are constantly being reviewed in line with guidance from health officials.

## Access to Parliament House

APH remains closed to the general public; this includes the galleries in each chamber. Parliamentary proceedings may still be viewed through the [APH website](#).

Committee hearings held in APH during the next parliamentary sitting week will not be open to the public. Arrangements will be made for witnesses to appear in person if essential. Committee proceedings may be viewed through the [APH website](#).

All school group bookings remain cancelled or postponed. Work is currently underway to determine when these may recommence.

The Department of Parliamentary Services is working with other national institutions that have similar programs. However, as APH is also a significant working space for thousands of people, special arrangements and restrictions will likely remain.

The Event spaces in APH remain closed to any bookings. Limited café and dining facilities for building occupants are now available, in line with restrictions in place in the ACT. In-Room dining will be available.

We will trial the removal of some of the temporary access restrictions that took effect on 23 March. That is, the following passholders will again be allowed to access the building, on certain conditions:

- Former parliamentarians;
- Elected members of other legislatures;
- Volunteers; and
- Sponsored pass holders.

Access to the building for these passholders is conditional on it only being utilised as strictly necessary, for specific meetings with parliamentarians that have been arranged prior to coming to the building. Passholders are expected to remain in the building only as long as their business requires. No gathering or loitering in the public or private areas of the building, including in café or dining spaces is to occur, nor being based in a private office of the building.

We understand that many of our colleagues wish to meet with external stakeholders as part of their parliamentary responsibilities, but as Presiding Officers we have a responsibility to comply with relevant regulations and for the safety of those in the building. The operation of this relaxation of access restrictions will be evaluated on a weekly basis and may be revoked if the above requirements are not complied with, and those breaching these requirements may lose access permanently.

Building occupants must continue to ensure only those external guests needing to conduct essential business in Parliament House this week are signed in. Similarly, members of the Federal Parliamentary Press Gallery are also asked to continue to avoid non-essential attendance of escorted visitors.

## Facilities in Parliament House

There have also been changes to facilities inside the building since the sittings of Parliament in May, including dining facilities and the Health & Recreation Centre. Detailed information about these changes will be circulated by the Department of Parliamentary Services.

## Measures implemented across Parliament House

The Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) continues to implement measures across APH as part of the ongoing pandemic response:

- physical distancing markers on floors at security screening points and food outlets
- hand sanitiser stations positioned in circulation spaces
- hygiene reminder signs in bathrooms
- additional cleaning of touch points such as door handles and lift buttons
- limiting access to tables in dining spaces
- signs in lifts and committee rooms specifying the maximum number of occupants; and
- all DPS food and retail outlets are cashless.

These measures will reduce the risk of transmission and are consistent with advice from the Australian Public Service Commission, Commonwealth Department of Health or Safe Work Australia.

Australian states and territories have applied their own [travel restrictions](#), including in some cases closing state borders. Parliamentarians have been requested to only bring essential staff to Canberra and Parliament House.

At all times Senators, Members and staff should follow the advice of health authorities regarding the need to seek medical advice and treatment. Up-to-date official information and advice is available from [ACT Health](#) and the [Commonwealth Department of Health](#).

As there are jurisdictional differences in the response to COVID-19, it is important to familiarise yourself with the current [ACT Government advice](#).

To reduce the risk of transmission, all building occupants must continue to follow the strict hygiene and social distancing requirements with which we have all become familiar.

As the situation continues to evolve, building occupants will be kept informed of any change regarding the operations of Parliament House. DPS will continue to provide regular updates regarding appropriate health measures via Information Circulars.

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