



Psychotherapy & Counselling
Federation of Australia

Overview of Restrictions in Victoria due to COVID-19

Updated 7 August 2020

Stage Four restrictions in Melbourne

If you are located in Melbourne, you may be able to continue providing face to face counselling and psychotherapy services but only in limited circumstances.

Permitted Work Premises

The DHHS now advises that:

Unless an exception applies, only Permitted Work Premises may operate with on-site operations during the restricted activity period in the Restricted Area, and only to the extent permitted.

Employers for Permitted Work Premises are only permitted to have employees on-site if it is not reasonably practicable for the employee to work from home and the employer and employee comply with the Directions currently in force, including the Workplace Directions and the Permitted Worker Permit Scheme Directions.

The definition of Permitted Work Premises is explained in the [Healthcare and Social Sector Guidance](#) from the Victorian Government. The definition includes some services where counsellors and psychotherapists may be working:

- Community-based health services
- Alcohol and other drug services
- Mental Health Services
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations
- All AHPRA registered health workers - and in addition, social work, speech pathology, dietetics and any other health worker required to fulfil a care plan endorsed by NDIS, TAC, Workcover or DVA - to provide services that prevent a significant change/deterioration in functional independence necessitating escalation of care (e.g. a requirement for specialist input/review, an increase in care needs and/or alternate accommodation, avoiding a hospital admission or emergency department presentation).

To ensure that PACFA members are following the stage 4 restrictions in force in Melbourne, PACFA sought advice from the Victorian Government on whether we come within the definition of “Mental Health Services” that are Permitted Work Premises.

We have been advised by the Victorian Chief Allied Health Officer that her assessment is that we are covered under Mental Health Services BUT face to face services should only be provided in absolutely critical circumstances. The Chief Allied Health Officer advises that counsellors and psychotherapists are strongly advised to use telehealth unless it is unavoidable to do face to face services.

Telehealth services should generally be delivered from home. You can only go to your work place to deliver telehealth services from there if you do not have the necessary equipment or work space at home.

If are travelling to work you must have a Permitted Worker Permit and have a COVID Safe Plan. However the basic principle is not to move about unless it is absolutely necessary.

Permitted Worker Permits

From 11:59pm on Wednesday 5 August, employers that require their staff to attend a work site must issue a worker permit to their employees – this is the employer’s responsibility.

Download the [Permitted worker permit \(Word\)](#).

Practitioners who are sole traders must issue a worker permit and sign the worker permit as both the employer and employee.

Employees must carry their Worker Permit, and should also carry photo identification, when travelling to and from the workplace. A Worker Permit can be shown electronically to authorities such as a photo, or scanned copy, on a mobile device.

Penalties of up to \$19,826 (for individuals) and \$99,132 (for businesses) will apply to employers who issue worker permits to employees who do not meet the requirements of the worker permit scheme or who otherwise breach the scheme requirements.

There will also be on-the-spot fines of up to \$1,652 (for individuals) and up to \$9,913 (for businesses) for anyone who breaches the scheme requirements. This includes employers and employees who do not carry their worker permit when travelling to and from work.

See the DHHS website for information about the [Permitted Worker Scheme](#).

Childcare Permits

Only the children of Permitted Workers and vulnerable children will be able to access childcare and kindergarten. For the purposes of childcare and kindergarten, a Permitted Worker can also include someone working from home.

If you require childcare when you are working, Childcare Permits are now required. The Victorian Government has released two forms. One for workers required onsite and one for workers who are working from home.

For further information and to download the forms please [click here](#).

Clients travelling for appointments

The [DHHS website](#) advises that people can leave home to receive health care or attend medical appointments.

Clients are therefore able to travel to see you for a counselling or psychotherapy appointment. Although the 5km limit does not apply to healthcare services, it is still recommended that you provide online or telephone services if possible and appropriate, instead of face-to-face services, to help reduce unnecessary travel outside the home. This will help keep clients stay safe and reduce risks of community transmission.

COVID Safe Plan

Under the Stage 4 restrictions, there are new requirements for businesses. If you are permitted to remain open you are also required by law to have a COVID Safe Plan. ***Employers must complete their COVID Safe Plan by 11.59pm on Friday 7 August 2020.*** Small businesses with less than 5 employees are exempt.

For information on how to create a COVID Safe plan, see the [Business Victoria website](#). This website includes a template for a COVID Safe Plan.

Stage Three restrictions in regional Victoria

Regional Victoria is in Stage 3 restrictions. There are four reasons people can leave home:

1. Shopping for food or other essential items
2. To provide care giving, for compassionate reasons or to seek medical treatment
3. For exercise (applies to outdoor exercise, and with only one other person or members of your household)
4. Work or study, if you cannot work or study from home.

This means counsellors and psychotherapists may still freely travel to work although they are being encouraged to work at home whenever possible. On-line and telephone services are therefore encouraged if this is possible and appropriate.

Face Masks and Eye Protection

From 11.59pm on Sunday 2 August 2020, all Victorians must wear a face covering when they leave home, no matter where they live. There are some [lawful excuses](#) for not wearing a face covering.

There are fines for failure to wear a mask in public.

For information on face masks and coverings, see [Face masks and coverings: Whole of Victoria](#). For specific information about face masks in the workplace, see [Face coverings at work](#).

For those located in Melbourne under Stage 4 restrictions

If you come within the definition of “Permitted Work Premises” and you are seeing clients face to face, you are now required to wear both a *disposable surgical mask and eye protection*.

The DHHS advise that all staff in “Permitted Work Premises” must wear (at a minimum) a level 1 or type 1 surgical mask while at work. This now includes non-public facing staff. The DHHS advise that you should not use cloth masks at work.

Exemptions for face masks, such as when lip reading is required by a client, is still an option, however a clear face shield would need to be used.

Staff who are directly involved in treating patients must also wear eye protection. Reading glasses are not considered protective eye wear.

Please visit the [DHHS website for further information](#).