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Live performance and entertainment sector needs special help to cope with coronavirus impact

The federal government must urgently look at providing further support for the live performance and entertainment industries, which are being heavily impacted by indefinite venue closures and event cancellations caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Protecting the health of the Australian public must be paramount and the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance supports all measures taken to date by public health authorities to minimise the spread of coronavirus, including the closure from Monday of non-essential public gatherings of more than 500 people.

The economic stimulus package announced on Thursday provides untargeted support for households and businesses, but it is clear that a separate plan is needed to help Australia's \$2.5 billion live performance industry manage through an indefinite period of disruption.

This is especially the case because the industry is characterised by disproportionately high levels of casual and contract employment, and a workforce that does not have recourse to paid leave entitlements.

“While the industry has maintained a business as usual approach until now, it is inevitable that venue closures and cancellations of shows and events will be necessary as part of the public health response,” said MEAA chief executive Paul Murphy.

“This will have a serious economic impact on the live performance and entertainment sector and the tens of thousands of people it employs, from front of house workers, to production crew, to performers themselves.

“Because the sector has such high levels of casual and contract employment, MEAA supports the call of Live Performance Australia for specific support for the arts and entertainment industries, and for special consideration to be given to extending a temporary 50% wage subsidy for employers of apprentices to help keep people employed in sector.

“The government must also urgently review its decision to rule out providing two weeks of paid special leave for those working without sick leave provisions.

“Due to the intermittent nature of their employment, many workers in the arts and entertainment industries are already on the economic margins and could be pushed into poverty without the ability to take paid leave.

“We welcome production companies and other employers who have offered to support their casual and contract staff with paid leave, and urge the government to step in to ensure that no workers in the industry suffer financial hardship.”

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