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Victorian government shows the way – feds and other states should follow

Thousands of casual workers employed at Victorian public sector venues closed by COVID-19 have been granted a financial lifeline after the Andrews Government today announced a wage subsidy.

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance welcomes this development and urges other states to adopt a similar approach.

Adam Portelli, MEAA's Victoria & Tasmania Regional Director, said the Andrews Government had stepped in to support workers at venues like Arts Centre Melbourne, Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, Rod Laver Arena, and the Melbourne Recital Centre who had been left out in the cold by the Federal Government's JobKeeper scheme.

Under the plan announced today by Victorian Treasurer Tim Pallas, many casual workers at arts and sporting venues will now be eligible for a wage subsidy of up to \$1500 a fortnight before tax until at least the end of September. These include casuals who have been engaged for less than 12 months and overseas visa holders.

"This is a huge win for thousands of workers at public sector venues throughout Victoria who were shut out of JobKeeper," Mr Portelli said.

"Congratulations to the hundreds of members of MEAA and other unions who signed petitions, lobbied politicians and never gave up fighting for justice after they had been abandoned by the Federal Government. Today's announcement will be a great relief for casual workers who faced the prospect of losing their jobs and applying for unemployment benefits to tide them over during winter."

MEAA chief executive Paul Murphy said the action by the Victorian Government was a model for other states to follow.

"To varying degrees, other state governments have offered to assist workers at public sector venues, but nothing to this extent," Mr Murphy said.

"The other states should immediately follow the Andrews Government by providing wage subsidies, so workers at venues like the Sydney Opera House, Queensland Performing Arts Centre and Adelaide Festival Centre do not fall through the cracks.

"It is shameful that the JobKeeper scheme has been designed in such a way that so many workers in the arts, entertainment and cultural sectors cannot access it.

"Official data released yesterday revealed that March 14 and April 18 27% of workers in the arts and recreation services sector lost their jobs. This was against an overall loss of 7.5% of jobs across all sectors.

"Wages for employees in the sector also decreased by 17.4% over the same five-week period. Treasurer Josh Frydenberg could amend the JobKeeper rules with a stroke of his pen to end this injustice."

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