PIA VICTORIA

COVID-19 RESPONSE PLAN

April 2020
FOREWORD

PIA is the national peak body representing planning and the planning profession. We represent over 1200 members in Victoria and 5300 nationally through our advocacy, publications and professional development programs.

The COVID-19 pandemic is changing the way we live and causing an unprecedented shock to our economy. This is likely to have a profound impact on planning and its related industries for years to come. PIA recognises the urgent need to support planners through the pandemic phase and beyond, as well as the need to articulate how the industry can play a major role in the recovery phase.

At a national level, PIA has developed a set of National Principles in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which provide a coordinated framework for the states and territories to prepare localised responses. PIA Victoria’s Response Plan sets out the actions and advocacy measures we will undertake on behalf of our members and the profession over the coming months. This is not a static document; instead it will change over time as the situation evolves.

As professional planners, our role is problem solving. Just like good planning outcomes, the actions within this document will require partnerships and collaboration. PIA is ready to assist.

I encourage you to get in touch if you would like to contribute.

Sincerely

Gareth Hately MPIA
Victorian President
The Planning Institute of Australia

On behalf of the Victorian Committee
COVID-19 pandemic and our response are changing the way we live and causing an unprecedented shock to our economy. PIA stands ready to promote how planning can do its part to keep things moving during the crisis and to set things up for the inevitable recovery in a changed world.

The following principles will guide advocacy for our members and the profession in the coming months.

1. **Our first duty is the protection of human life and safety**
   - Respect and accept the advice of health and scientific experts
   - Suspend any activity that has the potential for harm

2. **Planning must ensure health, safety and wellbeing during the crisis**
   - Temporarily suppress planning requirements that can jeopardise rapid health care delivery
   - Ensure that necessary health and essential services are able to be rapidly built and operate
   - Remove barriers to essential trading, efficient delivery, handling and best practice logistics

3. **The planning system must continue to function remotely and efficiently**
   - Introduce or strengthen remote communication technologies and practices that improve decision making systems and help collaboration in all levels of government
   - Remove regulatory barriers to remote or digital engagement (e.g. to enable tribunal appearances, meetings, document delivery), decision making and endorsement processes
   - Accelerate the implementation of e-planning

4. **Planning organisations must retain the capacity to operate**
   - Promote assistance to planning businesses/organisations during and post recovery
   - Advocate for initiatives that reduce business costs, retain planning staff and keep businesses operating
   - Support PIA’s accredited universities to make temporary changes to ensure minimal impact on students’ learning

5. **Planners must remain functional, be informed and connected**
   - Recognising the key role of planners in creating a quality-built environment it is essential that skills and capacity be improved during the crisis:
     - Training/professional development opportunities (especially in a digital form) should be made more available
     - Industry and social connection opportunities should be strengthened

6. **The planning system has a crucial role supporting and stimulating recovery**
   - Promote reform that enables well-planned development to occur when and where needed
   - Draw on the extensive network of expert planners who understand how to plan for world class economic, sustainable and social outcomes especially in the possible changed economic and political landscape post COVID-19
   - Reject “knee-jerk” and lasting system reforms that could undermine the planning process in the future and the positive outcomes we seek to achieve.

7. **Good planning must continue to deliver value for communities**
   - The value delivered by the planning process and the profession at large needs to be recognised and sustained during and post recovery in order to:
     - (refer: What is Good Planning? and The Value of Planning):
       - create great places and communities
       - deliver the housing and jobs we need
       - ensure the legitimacy of decision making and empower the community
       - effectively channel growth and investment (including infrastructure)
       - maintain the operation of the property market
       - respond to climate change, improve resilience and protect our environment and heritage

This COVID-19 crisis reminds us that planning is dynamic - we must re-learn what makes us resilient and recalibrate what we value and reassess what are prepared to plan and invest in.
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PIA VICTORIA’S TWO-PHASE RESPONSE

PIA Victoria has established a two-phase response to recognise that the actions and advocacy we undertake during the pandemic phase are urgent and require an immediate response to maintain the ongoing functioning of the planning system.

The recovery phase is about introducing measures to ensure the long-term success of the planning system. There is no reason why work cannot commence on the second phase at any time to enable a strong recovery.

PHASE ONE

KEEP THE PLANNING SYSTEM FUNCTIONING

To support the planning industry during the pandemic phase, PIA Victoria will:

- Provide continuity of service and support to members
- Collaborate with government and industry groups
- Seek immediate process, policy and regulatory reforms where they are justified as a means to enable the preservation of existing businesses and jobs
- Advocate for immediate investment and financial assistance

PHASE TWO

SUPPORT RECOVERY

In preparation to support the recovery phase, PIA Victoria will:

- Encourage a substantial pipeline of strategic planning projects and facilitation of development on a case-by-case basis
- Ensure the planning industry leverages off positive outcomes of innovation and investment during the pandemic phase, and realises the potential for long-term change
Provide continuity of service and support to members

• Deliver PIA PLANET courses online.
• Hold PIA events online where possible.
• Provide ongoing access to the PIA Victoria state office through remote working.
• Continue to use PIA E-News, virtual ‘coffee catch ups’ and online briefings to share information on the latest news from decision-makers and to support the profession.
• Through PIA’s existing Mentoring Program, encourage mentors and mentees to reach out to each other more regularly.
• Identify other initiatives to specifically assist:
  • Young planners and students.
  • Small and medium enterprises.
  • Those who have lost employment, or whose employment has been impacted due to the pandemic.

Collaborate with Government and other industry groups

• Work with other industry groups with common principles, strategies and actions to support efficiencies and strengthen PIA’s voice.
• Establish a COVID-19 PIA Advisory Group made up of representatives from the Victorian committee and the broader PIA network that will:
  • Assist in the delivery and evolution of the actions in this plan.
  • Provide a communication channel between Government, PIA Victoria members and the broader planning profession.
  • Highlight the challenges facing the profession across metropolitan and regional areas, and across the public and private sectors and consider how these may be addressed by the industry.

Seek immediate process, policy and regulatory reforms where they are justified as a means to enable the preservation of existing businesses and jobs

• Assist Government in resolving necessary amendments and clarifications on the requirements of the Local Government Act 1989 and the Planning and Environment Act 1987 in the current context to avoid unwarranted delays to planning processes.
• Encourage implementation of the recommendations of the Planning and Building Approvals Process Review undertaken by Better Regulation Victoria.
• Encourage Government to work with decision-making bodies to maintain a commitment to statutory timeframes.
• Encourage the use of online engagement tools and resources which allow the community to continue to participate in planning processes.
Advocate for investment and financial assistance

- Advocate for the delivery of immediate technology initiatives by Government to support decision-making bodies, including Planning Panels Victoria and VCAT, and councils that are not well-equipped to function online or in a remote working environment.
- Advocate for Government support to retain contracted planning staff across State and local government.

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- Encourage Government to allow for a consistent and streamlined approach to strategic planning projects and planning applications that require on-the-ground data collection, e.g. car parking surveys, throughout the extent of the ‘Stay at home’ direction.
- Encourage a consistent approach to modifications to planning permit requirements to allow for the delivery of essential goods or services.
- Support the trial of innovative planning and regulatory regimes that enable existing and new businesses to continue to operate and/or establish in designated locations where requirements are reduced on an interim basis.

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Encourage a substantial pipeline of strategic planning projects and facilitation of development on a case-by-case basis

- Encourage State and Local government to continue to invest in strategic planning projects that will unlock short to medium term economic, environmental and social wellbeing opportunities.
- Encourage State Government to fast-track pre-authorisation and approval of planning scheme amendments, and for the Minister for Planning to use his powers to rapidly approve ‘corrections’ amendments and any other types of uncontroversial planning scheme amendments.
- Strengthen existing governance models and explore reforms to deliver whole-of-government land use and infrastructure coordination in an expedited manner.
- Launch a state-wide infrastructure investment program to address and prioritise identified infrastructure shortfalls.
- Support targeted development facilitation by Councils and State Government where they align with strategic plans.
- Support broad-scale changes to systems that involve initiatives to enable local, resilient communities, including remote working, local employment, economic development and other ‘20 minute neighbourhood’ initiatives beyond the pandemic phase.
- Support local initiatives to facilitate the rejuvenation of neighbourhood activity centres from retail strips to places that support a wider range of social and economic needs and support stronger local community resilience.

Ensure the planning industry leverages off positive outcomes of innovation and investment during the pandemic phase, and realises the potential for long-term change

- Encourage Government to commit to a recovery and stimulus package that embeds environmental, social and economic sustainability principles, including:
  - Investment in renewable energy technology and infrastructure.
  - The direction of economic stimulus and recovery funds towards the delivery of social housing projects.
- Ensure that investment in online technology continues to be used beyond the pandemic phase, including any transition from paper-based processes to ‘Smart’ systems.
- As part of PIA Victoria’s Research Strategy, commission research to:
  - Identify key and emerging industries that will support the recovery phase, to determine how the planning system can in turn support them.
  - Understand the long-term, secondary impacts that COVID-19 is likely to have on the planning system, and how such impacts can be managed and mitigated to better prepare for future pandemics.