Temporary migrants in limbo because of COVID-19: Implications for health & well-being

The Public Health Association of Australia is calling on the Government to provide a financial safety net for temporary migrants who are in limbo because of COVID-19.

There are more than two million temporary visa holders living in Australia who have no access to the government’s $130 billion JobKeeper wage subsidy program or the expanded JobSeeker welfare payment. A recent survey of more than 3,700 temporary migrants conducted by Unions New South Wales found that 50 percent had lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 economic downturn. A further 20 percent had their working hours reduced and 43 percent said they were skipping meals due to their economic situation.

“We are pleased that that the Government agreed last week to give temporary migrants access to their superannuation, but it needs to go further. The Government must give temporary migrants’ access to JobKeeper and JobSeeker.” said Professor Jaya Dantas, Convenor, of the PHAA International Health Special Interest Group.

The largest category of temporary migrants consists of 650 000 international students. International students are Australia’s fourth largest export sector, which supports more than 240,000 jobs across the country. International students have been particularly impacted by COVID-19. According to UNESCO, as of 15 April 2020, 191 countries have closed educational institutions, impacting 1.5 billion students, more than half of these students are in Higher Education.

“Many international students have lost their jobs due to COVID, are not eligible for Jobseeker or JobKeeper but cannot return home because their home country is in lock down. As a result they are under significant stress and are suffering heightened anxiety.” said Professor Dantas.

“The government recommends temporary migrants go home, but for most of them it is simply not an option. International education contributed $37 billion to Australia’s tertiary education sector in 2019. It is unreasonable to expect students to leave without completing their degree,” said Professor Dantas.

“The Government must provide further flexibility to visa deadline extensions and visa conditions including requirements to work or study,” said Professor Dantas. As Australians we are proud of our cultural diversity and we cannot leave people behind in times of peril.

“Temporary migrants, including international students contribute significantly to our economy especially to the higher education sector and pay their taxes. We should support them in this time of need during a global pandemic” said Professor Dantas.

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IEAA submission to the senate select committee on Temporary Migration. https://www.ieaa.org.au/documents/item/1771
https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse
https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/media-item/canberra-jobs-plan-throws-lifeline-to-international-students/