

## **SUMMARY OF BUV SUPPORT HUB ADVICE RE VACCINATION OF RELIGIOUS WORKERS**

The Victorian Government's COVID Safe Settings place restrictions on many aspects of life, including church activities. There are complexities and ambiguities in determining what compliance with the settings entails in various situations. In response to some questions from the Baptist Union of Victoria Support Hub, the Department of Health responded:

*Unfortunately, the Department of Health is unable to provide specific COVID-19 vaccination advice or information relating to the COVID-19 vaccination requirements which apply to certain operators, employers, workers and specified facilities in Victoria. The Department recommends that you seek further, specific (including legal) advice on how such COVID-19 vaccination requirements may apply in your specific circumstances.*

Following discussion of the Mandatory Vaccination Directions with a lawyer, the BUV Support Hub offers the following advice:

The BUV Support Hub advises churches and Pastors that in view of the Mandatory Vaccination Directions, we consider that usual Pastoral duties (apart from supporting those facing end-of-life), that require working outside of a religious worker's home, can only be carried out by those who have provided proof of vaccination or medical exemption, as set out in the Directions. **Unvaccinated workers (paid or volunteer) and those with unknown vaccination status should not work or serve outside of their usual place of residence.**

We understand that the exceptions attached to the definition of "religious worker" are very narrow and likely to be impractical in a typical Baptist church context. Though the provision of support at end-of-life is relevant.

Pastors or churches who disagree with this position are advised to obtain their own legal advice on their specific circumstances.

**Under the Directions, churches must maintain a record of staff and volunteers who are undertaking authorised work in connection with the church.** This information should be stored securely and destroyed when no longer relevant. The BUV Support Hub has provided a template for the collection of this information that respects privacy requirements.

Discussions between church leaders and workers who have not provided evidence of vaccination or medical exemption should seek to explore options for working in alternative ways (e.g. redeployment to other duties, working from home, prerecording of services, etc). Such staff should consider taking accumulated leave, including Long Service Leave. In the event that a church decides to terminate a calling or appointment because a person cannot fulfil their role, the church would need to comply with any contract of employment and its Constitution. Obviously, we want to avoid such terminations whenever possible.

In discussing issues related to vaccinations, churches should recognise their duty of care and the Christian perspective of putting the common good ahead of asserting individual rights.