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I am writing to you both in my capacity as President of the Mosman Chamber of Commerce, on behalf of our local businesses, and I request that you please pass this letter to the most relevant people within State and Federal Government to action as soon as possible.

My comments herein represent feedback gained from a diverse group of businesses, including hospitality, tourism, beauty, health & fitness, retail, pharmacies. The key issues facing business at present are the same across the board and the situation is now dire – in their words “right now is the worst we have experienced since this pandemic started 2 years ago”, hence my letter to you today.

The key issues are:

1. Consumer confidence – is at an all-time low. Our streets and shops are close to empty. Even online sales are low. People are not going out, and they are not spending money.
2. Staff - on top of an already tight labour market, businesses must now work around staff isolating as they are covid-positive, or isolating due to being a close contact. Hospitality in particular has been hard hit, making it in many cases too difficult for cafes and restaurants to open their doors. Many businesses are operating on vastly reduced hours, or have had to close their doors altogether. One local café has now been closed for 3 weeks, in what should be their busiest time of year, a time when they anticipated making up for prior covid-related losses.

The above issues are resulting in severe cash flow problems, and in particular, there is a huge amount of stress and pressure due to inability to meet rent obligations.

Businesses that have had to temporarily close their doors come from all sectors. Apart from adversely impacting revenue for those businesses, the image of businesses with closed doors and their lights off does nothing to help build consumer confidence. It looks bleak.

For small business in particular this has been a very long 2 years, but right now these businesses feel at their lowest point, with little, if any, Government support. These businesses have exhausted their lines of credit, eaten into savings and are now feeling defeated. They have immediate cash flow problems, and feel there is no light at the end of the tunnel.

I have had business owners calling me in tears. Others saying they have no words anymore to describe how they are feeling. The situation for small business is truly desperate.

I urge the State and Federal Government to please consider urgent financial support for small business. The Government has done well to help keep businesses afloat for 2 years so for them to fail at this stage would be a waste of the investment provided to date, and will further erode consumer confidence.

Suggestions:

- Immediate financial assistance for the business owner where the business has incurred in excess of 30% reduction in turnover.
- Rent relief – extension of mandated rent relief is welcome but still many landlords are not forthcoming with any concessions, not even willing to discuss a compromise or plan. And this still leaves the rent debt accruing. Can assistance be provided for rent payments, particularly for businesses that have had to close their doors for a period of time?
- Include hospitality in the list of industries where ‘close contacts’ no longer need to isolate for 7 days.
- Open international borders to international students, and working holiday makers, to improve supply in the labour market.

I appreciate that navigating this pandemic, trying to balance competing needs and budget constraints, is incredibly challenging, but it is absolutely heartbreaking to see what is happening to our small businesses, the so-called backbone of the Australian economy.

Yours sincerely,

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