



Supporting the flow of credit

The Government, Reserve Bank of Australia and the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority have taken coordinated action to support the flow of credit in the Australian economy, in particular for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Timely access to cheaper credit is vital to help SMEs get through the impact of the Coronavirus and adapt, grow and create jobs as the economy rebuilds.

Coronavirus SME Guarantee Scheme

Across the economy, many otherwise viable small and medium sized businesses are facing the ongoing impacts of Coronavirus.

The Coronavirus SME Guarantee Scheme is providing support for these businesses. Under the Scheme, the Government is providing a guarantee of 50 per cent to participating lenders for new cheaper loans provided to SMEs. The Scheme enhances lenders' ability to provide cheaper credit, allowing SMEs to access funding to recover from the impacts of the pandemic and invest for the future.

Phase 1 of the Scheme provided SMEs with access to unsecured working capital loans of up to \$250,000 for terms of up to three years to help them get through the impact of the Coronavirus. Phase 1 commenced on 23 March 2020 and ceased for new loans on 30 September 2020.

The Scheme has now been extended to support businesses in recovery and to enable continued support for SMEs facing the ongoing impacts of the Coronavirus.

Under Phase 2, from 1 October 2020 until 30 June 2021, eligible lenders are able to offer loans on the following enhanced terms:

- Loans can be used for a broader range of business purposes, including to support investment.
- Borrowers can access up to \$1 million in total.
- Loans can be for terms of up to five years, and a repayment holiday is not required but can be offered at the discretion of the lender.
- Loans can be either unsecured or secured (excluding residential property).

Phase 2 will continue to support lenders' ability to provide credit to SMEs, with the enhancements meeting the evolving needs of SMEs. To ensure SMEs benefit from low interest rates, rates will be capped at around 10 per cent per annum.

Loans will continue to be subject to lenders' credit assessment processes with the expectation that lenders will look through the cycle to sensibly take into account the uncertainty of the current economic conditions.

Quick and efficient access to credit for small businesses

The Government has provided an exemption from responsible lending obligations for lenders providing credit to small business customers. This exemption extends until 2 April 2021, and applies to any credit for business purposes, including new credit, credit limit increases and credit variations and restructures. Responsible lending obligations do not currently apply to lending which is predominantly for a business purpose, but it can take time and effort for lenders to be satisfied that the money borrowed meets this test. A temporary exemption from responsible lending obligations, will help small businesses get access to credit quickly and efficiently.

The exemption will apply while the Government implements a broader package of reforms to Australia's lending laws, commencing 1 March 2021 (subject to the passage of legislation), to reduce the regulatory burden on lenders and borrowers. As part of these reforms, the Government will make the temporary exemption permanent.

Supporting the flow and reducing the cost of credit – Reserve Bank of Australia

The Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) has implemented a package that has put downward pressure on borrowing costs for households and businesses. This is helping to mitigate the adverse consequences of the Coronavirus on businesses and support their day-to-day trading operations. The RBA is supporting small businesses as a particular priority.

The RBA has established a term funding facility for the banking system. Banks will have access to up to \$200 billion in funding at a fixed interest rate of 0.25 per cent. This reinforces the benefits of a low cash rate by reducing funding costs for banks, which in turn will help reduce interest rates for borrowers. To encourage lending to businesses, the facility offers additional low-cost funding to banks if they expand their business lending, with particular incentives applying to loans to SMEs.

Supporting Non-ADI and smaller ADI Lenders in the Securitisation market

The Government has provided the Australian Office of Financial Management (AOFM) with \$15 billion to invest in structured finance markets used by smaller lenders, including non-Authorised Deposit-taking Institutions (Non-ADI) and smaller Authorised Deposit-taking Institutions (ADI). AOFM is providing this support by making direct investments to support these lenders.

This program assists smaller lenders that are not benefitting from the RBA's term funding facility, to maintain access to cheaper funding and support competition in the lending market. This in turn is helping to keep mortgages and other borrowing costs for businesses low.

For more information

For more information on the Australian Government's Economic Response to the Coronavirus visit treasury.gov.au/coronavirus.

Businesses can visit business.gov.au to find out more about how the Economic Response complements the range of support available to small and medium businesses.

For more information on the Reserve Bank of Australia's announcement visit:
<https://www.rba.gov.au/mkt-operations/announcements/term-funding-facility-to-support-lending-to-australian-businesses.html> and

<https://www.rba.gov.au/mkt-operations/announcements/rba-purchases-of-government-securities.html>.

For more information on the Show Starter Loans and other support measures included in the COVID-19 Creative Economy Support Package visit: <https://www.arts.gov.au/covid-19-update>