



Australian Government



## SAMOA COVID-19 DEVELOPMENT RESPONSE PLAN

- Samoa and Australia have an enduring partnership, strengthened by the Pacific Step-up, which focuses on shared labour mobility, governance, trade, development and security priorities.
- Samoa responded early to COVID-19 and has not recorded any cases. The global economic lockdown is having significant economic and social impacts on tourism, trade and human capital development.
- Australia and Samoa will work together to strengthen the preparedness and responsiveness of Samoa's health system and enhance Samoa's resilience to COVID-19 impacts as well as future economic and climate shocks.

Australia and Samoa have an enduring and cooperative relationship that spans political, security, business and people-to-people links. Australia will support Samoa to respond to COVID-19 and strengthen health systems, promote stability and support economic recovery. We will work with other key partners including the World Bank, the United Nations, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and other bilateral donors. Through Australian support, including in response to the measles outbreak in late 2019, Samoa has already accessed valuable public health and clinical expertise to support COVID-19 preparedness. Australia is supporting national policy makers to mitigate COVID-19's economic impacts, through our governance programs. Our ongoing partnership will focus both on meeting short term needs and laying the foundations for long-term recovery and resilience.

### COVID-19 SITUATION ANALYSIS

Due to swift Government of Samoa action, Samoa has remained COVID-19 free as of September 2020. However, the effects of a future outbreak could be severe. Existing health challenges heighten Samoans' individual susceptibility to COVID-19: 46 per cent of the adult population is obese and there is high prevalence of hypertension, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

The health system requires further strengthening in order to respond efficiently and effectively to future infectious diseases outbreaks. With Australia's support, Samoa has secured greater testing and diagnostic capacity, essential medical equipment, and personal protective equipment. To maximise these assets, strong capabilities in planning, coordination, supply chain management and service delivery are needed. Clear, consistent messaging, joined-up action and timely deployment of appropriate skills and expertise are also imperative.

Economically, Samoa is reliant on tourism, agriculture, remittances and development assistance. It is highly vulnerable to economic shocks and natural disasters. The global financial crisis of 2008, coupled with the earthquake and tsunami of 2009, created economic losses equivalent to 20 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The ADB anticipates an economic contraction of 5 per cent in 2020. There is a risk that the economic toll of COVID-19 may eclipse the downturn of 2009.

The full impacts of the recession will become clear over time, but Samoa is braced for a sharp decline in foreign earnings, private consumption and investment. The private sector is navigating the prospect of loan defaults and bankruptcies. Tourism has fallen sharply: as of June 2020, 33 of 110 hotels and 131 of 141 handicraft businesses were closed for trading. More than 2,200 workers in the tourism sector are working reduced hours or have been laid off. Unemployment rates, which have fallen steadily over the last six years (to 7.6 per cent in 2019) are expected to climb sharply. In 2019, remittances accounted for 16 per cent of GDP, meaning that a downturn in regional labour markets will compound falling national fortunes.

Total public debt stands at 48 per cent of GDP. In the last two years, the ADB and International Monetary Fund (IMF) have declared Samoa to have a "high risk of debt distress". The economic effects of the measles outbreak and the COVID-19 pandemic have heightened that risk. In July 2020, the ADB projects that Samoa's fiscal balance will fall from an estimated 2.7 per cent of GDP in 2019 to -7.3 per cent in 2020 and -9.9 per cent in 2021. Samoa's vulnerability to natural disasters and climate change impacts increases the possibility of further shocks.

While Samoa has made significant progress in human development, 22.7 per cent of Samoans in 2018 continued to live below the basic needs poverty line. In

the next two years, progress made since the global financial crisis may erode and poverty may climb towards - or even surpass - the 26.9 per cent basic needs poverty rate recorded in 2008.

The effects of COVID-19 will be felt unevenly: the unemployed, female-headed households, the elderly, persons with disabilities, informal sector workers and those in adversely-affected sectors (for example, tourism) are particularly vulnerable. Women may be expected to undertake more unpaid domestic work, while being less able to access essential health services and more vulnerable to economic hardship. Almost half of Samoan women aged 15-49 have reported experiencing sexual violence by an intimate partner and the impacts of COVID-19 may increase the rate of such incidents. There remains space to better protect and assist survivors and improve child protection systems.

People with disabilities are more likely to experience pre-existing health conditions that put them at a higher risk of illness or COVID-19-related death. They are also at increased risk of social isolation and weakened access to essential items, services and support.

Further school closures and the absence of widely accessible online learning platforms may translate to a downturn in the mean years of schooling, falling test scores and a loss in earnings. In the short-term, boys from vulnerable households are particularly prone to dropping out. In the longer-term, Samoans with limited formal training may be unable to secure access to competitive overseas labour markets. In these circumstances, the economy would be poorly placed to support the Government of Samoa's goals of increasing domestic production and reducing reliance on imports.

## AUSTRALIA'S RESPONSE

Through the Pacific Step-up, the Australian Government will stand with Samoa in overcoming the current crisis, actively supporting Samoa's COVID-19 preparedness, response, and recovery in line with *Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 Development Response*.

Our approach is informed by a degree of uncertainty about the trajectory, nature and timing of COVID-19 impacts in Samoa and the region. This uncertainty, coupled with the risks of COVID-19 cases and a long, deep economic downturn, will remain until an affordable and effective vaccine becomes readily available. Against this backdrop, we will work with partners to strengthen the preparedness, resilience and responsiveness of Samoa's health system to respond to COVID-19 and public health crises, and to manage future disease outbreaks. We will also support Samoa to maintain

stability, promote social cohesion and ensure vulnerable people have access to essential goods, services and opportunities. A key priority will be supporting Samoa to mitigate and recover from COVID-19's economic impacts and enhance its resilience to future shocks.

## Health Security

We will support Samoa to plan, deliver and monitor responses to COVID-19 and strengthen routine health systems, including through a new partnership with the World Bank. Australia's Samoa Health Program, working with the Indo-Pacific Centre for Health Security, will provide Samoan health sector professionals with improved skills and understanding in COVID-19-related fields (including building system capabilities in surveillance and pathology). We will work toward equitable access to safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines in Samoa through multilateral and regional initiatives to finance, assess, deliver and monitor COVID-19 vaccines. In addition, we will continue to provide advice to help Samoa maintain robust quarantine arrangements - which are crucial to Samoa's health security - to facilitate the ongoing movement of people in the region. This is necessary for future economic recovery.

System preparedness and outbreak response capabilities are imperative, but these must not crowd-out other health system demands. Australian support will continue to address the ongoing communicable and non-communicable disease burden. We will provide access to sexual and reproductive health services, particularly for vulnerable individuals and households, through the Impact Project: Catalysing Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights in Samoa Project.

## Stability

Samoa will require capable, efficient, transparent, inclusive, and accountable institutions as it seeks to bounce back. To this end, Australia will support Samoa to preserve critical governance and democratic reforms undertaken since the Asian financial crisis. Australia will support Samoa to further enhance its state capabilities, ensure continuation of key services (for example, delivery of water and wastewater services) and support vulnerable populations during this time of crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the ongoing need to improve planning and coordination, public financial management, modelling capabilities (for example, regarding climate change) and public system resilience. These priorities must now be pursued in a tightening fiscal environment, with the clear goal of improving frontline service delivery for the benefit of all.

Australia and Samoa are committed to facilitating evidence-informed decision-making, translating policy into practice, and ensuring those affected by decisions are actively involved in decision-making processes.

Human capital is vitally important to Samoa's recovery. While school participation rates are high, there remains scope to secure and improve learning outcomes for all. We will promote necessary adjustments in the education system through the Education Sector Support Program. We will continue to focus on strengthening quality and inclusiveness in basic education, ensuring investments are consistent with the needs and priorities of all learners, including those with disabilities. In the new context, we will support partners to adapt and respond where there is need and opportunity (for example, through using online delivery platforms). In addition, we will enhance the quality and relevance of technical and vocational education and training programs and help broaden participation among those who have become disengaged from further education and employment.

Our gender programs, including Women in Leadership in Samoa, will continue to build resilience and facilitate economic growth to enhance the well-being of women and girls. These programs, as well as our funding to the Samoa Disability Partnership Program, will further cement our mutual commitment to focus on the most vulnerable, including women and girls, people with disabilities, and those living in poverty.

Australia will continue to invest in Samoa's disaster and climate resilience and preparedness, including through regional climate change programs, and integrating resilience across our portfolio. To address the pressing food security needs of the most vulnerable, the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) will enhance farmer resilience and improve food and nutrition security.

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) will continue to build Samoa's capability to police its borders and secure its exclusive economic zone, including fisheries. The Australian Federal Police (AFP) will continue to engage with the Samoa Police Service to strengthen core policing functions and bolster organisational leadership, management, and corporate capabilities, broadly and in priority areas (for example, addressing gender-based violence).

### ***Economic Recovery***

The Government of Samoa and businesses face pressing challenges. The Government's two stimulus packages in the first half of 2020 sought to protect or cushion families from the impacts of COVID-19, while keeping

businesses solvent. The ability of Government to finance such measures in the medium-term will be informed by the depth and length of the economic downturn and the health of public finances.

The Government of Samoa will need to make prudent investments that stimulate recovery and economic resilience, while navigating a pathway through debt management and fiscal sustainability. Adjustments will be required across all sectors. Line ministries may be required to operate in a tightening fiscal environment requiring difficult policy and operational decisions.

Australia is acutely aware of these challenges. The Joint Policy Action Matrix - a collaboration between the Governments of Samoa, Australia and New Zealand and the ADB and World Bank - will be used as a mechanism to leverage policy reforms and to channel and monitor budget support, including that provided by Australia in mid-2020. Through close engagement with the Samoan Government and business community, we will actively support measures that facilitate work and economic empowerment, that nurture an enabling business environment, and that stimulate long-term recovery and resilience.

Australia's resilient infrastructure investments, such as the planned construction of the Legislative Assembly Office, will provide opportunities for employment and skills generation. Further opportunities will be explored through the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific.

Labour mobility remains a key mutual priority: we will work closely with Samoa, Australian state and territory governments and industry to safely re-establish labour mobility schemes, including negotiating repatriation arrangements. We will support inclusive skills development through the Australia Pacific Training Coalition, adapting training to ensure offerings reflect the needs of employers in Samoa and those industries hardest hit (such as tourism). We will also work to leverage opportunities to link skills with our infrastructure investments.

Samoa's economic and social recovery will rely on open and reliable trade corridors and free movement of technical expertise, goods and, when safe and appropriate, tourists. Our support for the Pacific Islands Forum's Pacific Humanitarian Pathway will foster ongoing connectivity between Australia and Samoa, supporting the movement of critical supplies and people, and mitigating severe health and economic impacts. We will look to support longer-term solutions for Pacific aviation.

Australia will provide COVID-19 supplementary funding of \$304.7 million as part of a COVID-19 Response Package. This package will provide support to the Pacific and Timor-Leste to deliver critical, temporary, economic support to address pandemic impacts; this targeted, temporary (ODA) funding is for two years and is in addition to Australia's \$4 billion ODA program.

## HOW WE WILL WORK

Australia's support to Samoa will be led by local priorities. We will work closely with a broad range of government, civil society, faith-based and international development partners to help solve pressing problems. In doing so, Australia will play to its comparative advantages and leverage the expertise of others. Australia will ensure our investments in the response phase are consistent with a longer-term vision for post-COVID-19 Samoa.

We will promote measures that are inclusive in ends and means, ensuring vulnerable groups - including women and girls and people with disabilities - secure benefit from, and are involved in, decision-making processes. We will advocate for and undertake specific measures to ensure everyone has access to opportunities, goods and services, and that households, communities, service providers and the national economy are more resilient to future shocks.

Australia will use a range of modalities to support Samoa's resilience, security and prosperity. The choice of modality will be guided by our shared commitment to

deliver effective and efficient change for those most in need. We will continue to work through Government of Samoa systems (providing targeted and general budget support) where appropriate, while also working with and through multilateral institutions, non-government organisations, civil society, managing contractors and other bodies.

We will continue to provide targeted technical assistance that meets the priority needs of key decision-makers in both established (for example, economic policy) and emerging areas (including social protection). We will make greater use of local expertise, and develop creative models for remote support (for example, using mentoring, synthesising international evidence, peer review, and policy options drawn from external environments).

We will continue to nurture people-to-people links and support tomorrow's leaders, while building the skills and capabilities required to support Samoa's recovery. We will pursue opportunities for virtual short-courses and continue offering post-graduate scholarships for online programs.

Inbuilt programming flexibility will allow us to respond to opportunities, navigate the evolving context and adjust strategies and investments in the pursuit of optimal returns. We will promote similar ways of working with our partners. We will foster a culture of mutual accountability and open and honest review, with a view to learning and improving performance.





Table 1: COVID-19 Response Plan Performance Framework

Response Plan	Health Security	Stability	Economic Recovery
<b>Expected Outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The health system is better prepared to detect and control disease outbreaks and manage future public health crises</li> <li>The health system improves service delivery to meet ongoing health needs</li> </ul> (SDGs 1, 3, 5, 13, 16 & 17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vulnerable people have improved access to essential goods and services and livelihood opportunities that mitigate the impacts of COVID-19</li> <li>The Government of Samoa implements evidence-informed social measures that support COVID-19 response and recovery</li> </ul> (SDGs 1, 2, 4, 5, 10, 13, 16 & 17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Government of Samoa implements responsible and evidence-informed fiscal and economic measures that mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 and support inclusive growth and resilience</li> <li>Individuals and the business community are better placed to adapt to new market circumstances</li> </ul> (SDGs 1, 5, 8, 9, 10, 13, 16 & 17)
<b>Key Results</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number (and nature) of instances of strengthened health systems, including preparedness for emergencies and public health crises (Target: 3 significant instances of change)</li> <li>Evidence of improved response to health security threats (Target: 2 significant instances of change)</li> <li>Number of people immunised with Australian support</li> <li>Number of women and men accessing SRHR services provided with Australian support (a) (Target: 10 per cent increase over pre-COVID-19 baseline)</li> <li>Total number of SRHR-related appointments held at frontline service units, provided with Australian support (Target: 10% increase over pre-COVID-19 baseline)</li> <li>Contraceptive protection from unplanned pregnancy made available through Australian support (Target: 10 per cent increase in Couple-Years of Protection over pre-COVID-19 baseline)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number (and nature) of instances of improved social protection-related policies and/or measures (Target: 1 significant instances of change)</li> <li>Number of women and girl survivors receiving support services</li> <li>Number (and nature) of instances of improved policies and/or measures that seek to combat gender-based violence (Target: 2 significant instances of change)</li> <li>Percentage of Year 4 and Year 6 students meeting a minimum Level 3 for Literacy and Numeracy (Target: 3 per cent increase over baseline)</li> <li>Number of students with disabilities enrolled at all levels (Target: 278)</li> <li>Percentage of schools implementing online learning plans (Target: 50 per cent of schools)</li> <li>Number (and nature) of instances of improved policies and/or measures that seek to improve education quality for all (Target: 5 significant instances of change)</li> <li>Number (and nature) of instances of improved food security-related policies and/or measures, including farmer resilience under climate change conditions and market challenges (Target: 1 significant instances of change)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number (and nature) of instances of the Government of Samoa having adopted responsible and evidence-informed fiscal and economic measures that mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 (Target: 2 significant instances of change)</li> <li>Number (and nature) of instances of the Government of Samoa having adopted responsible and evidence-informed fiscal and economic measures that support inclusive growth and resilience (Target: 2 significant instances of change)</li> <li>Number of people supported to have raised incomes and better jobs or livelihoods (Target: 600)</li> <li>Examples of partnering with the private sector and other partners to ensure supply lines are open</li> <li>Australian budget support as a % of supplementary budget expenditure in response to COVID-19</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting Investments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Samoa Health Program</li> <li>The Impact Project: Catalysing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Samoa Project</li> <li>Immunisation Systems Strengthening Program</li> <li>Australia Assists</li> <li>Transformative Agenda for Women, Youth and Adolescents in the Pacific (led by United Nations Population Fund)</li> <li>Australia's Health Security Initiative for the Indo-Pacific Region</li> <li>World Bank Advance Universal Health Care Multi-Donor Trust Fund</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Samoa Australia Police Partnership (led by Australian Federal Police)</li> <li>Pacific Maritime Security Program (led by Department of Defence)</li> <li>Defence Cooperation Program</li> <li>Education Sector Support Program</li> <li>Global Partnership for Education</li> <li>Australian Humanitarian Partnership</li> <li>Australian Centre for International Agriculture Research</li> <li>Cyber Cooperation Program</li> <li>Samoa Women Shaping Development</li> <li>Civil Society Support Program</li> <li>Samoa Disability Partnership Program</li> <li>Australia Pacific Climate Partnership</li> <li>Samoa Governance Support Program</li> <li>Women in Leadership</li> <li>Samoa Gender Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Private Sector Development Initiative</li> <li>Business Partnerships Program</li> <li>Pacific Labour Scheme and Seasonal Workers Programme</li> <li>Samoa Parliament Complex Redevelopment</li> <li>Australia Pacific Training Coalition</li> <li>Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific</li> <li>Samoa Fiscal Resilience Program</li> <li>Samoa Procurement Support Program</li> <li>Pacific Horticulture Agriculture Market Access Program</li> <li>Samoa Agribusiness Support Program</li> <li>Essential Services and Humanitarian Corridor</li> </ul>