

Pressure grows on Govt to offer more than wage subsidy

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Government Covid financial support for small and medium business employers will be “top of the list” for discussion when the country’s chambers of commerce chief executives meet Economic Development Minister Stuart Nash online tomorrow.

Auckland Chamber of Commerce chief executive Michael Barnett, whose petition calling for Government support for employers along with employees had 39,000 signatures yesterday, said he’d invited about 15 chamber bosses on to the Zoom call with Nash, when funding for business owners would be the priority subject.

The petition, which is also circulating in the South Island, calls for the Government to extend its

Covid financial subsidy offer to SMEs as well as wage earners.

The petition closes on Friday evening and will go to Finance Minister Grant Robertson.

Barnett said he’d been assured by Robertson’s office that the idea was being considered and discussed with Inland Revenue.

“It’s important for the Government to see beyond the wage subsidy. Businesses need help.”

He had been “frustrated” to hear a minister respond “they’re getting the wage subsidy and the [Covid] resurgence support payment and now they want more?”

He declined to name the minister.

The wage subsidy did not support an employer. It went straight to the employee and the business owner had to pay 80 per cent of the wage to qualify, Barnett said.

“Having to explain that to some of them is frustrating. They have no idea of the [Covid] pressure on businesses and communities.”

Business owners in lockdown and Covid restrictions still had to pay rent, rates, power and other overheads. They were doing so out of their own pockets, said Barnett.

“We have been asked to pause business so that Government can implement their elimination strategy for the good of New Zealand so a continuation of the resurgence package is not a big ask.”

He said he’d been contacted by SME owners as far away as Fiordland “telling me their stories and how destructive lockdowns have been to their sectors”.

The petition launched on Monday at 11am. By 3.30pm that day it had gathered more than 7000 signatures.

