

Govt's support package a welcome relief, say business leaders

"The recognition by the Government [that] the human cost to business owners, their families and employees is a health and wellbeing issue shows they have listened.

"I would give an 8/10 for this package, I appreciate there will be some finessing to elements of it and there are some issues yet to be addressed for the hospitality sector in Auckland to improve their ability to operate but these should be sorted over the next few weeks," Barnett said.

Brett O'Riley, chief executive of the Employers and Manufacturers Association, said the EMA welcomed the Government's announcement of support for Auckland business and the new Covid-19 protection framework.

However, O'Riley questioned how the new "traffic light" system was going to work in practice for businesses and how the Government would reach those communities who are opposed to the vaccine.

"We are pleased to see that the specific support we've been asking for . . . has come to fruition but there will be many challenges before it can be introduced, and in its implementation," he said.

"The community-wide requirement for Covid-19 vaccinations certificates will be a strong incentive for those people who are yet to make the decision to get vaccinated.

"Getting to the 90 per cent target in Auckland is going to be a challenge and while the \$120m allocated to targeting our Māori community is great news, we'd like to know particularly how the Government plans to reach other communities, such as those who are opposed to this vaccine but would have one of the others."

He said the Government's focus on and funding of a programme for mental health and wellbeing for business and was crucial for recovery.

"We hear [every day] through our AdviceLine and the Business Helpline how people are suffering and we look forward to working with the Auckland Business Chamber on this initiative.

"We will also be able to provide business support assistance through the Regional Business Partner (RBP) Network.

"The \$50m for the RBP to provide

10,000 businesses with mentoring and advice to help them recover and grow into the future is an excellent practical step to support our businesses and economy.

"The doubling of the Resurgence Payment . . . and its two-weekly payment frequency will also be critical for businesses that have been on the brink for months and will be the difference for many being able to survive

until the traffic light system is implemented in Auckland," O'Riley said.

Hospitality NZ chief executive Julie White said the financial support from the Government was "better late than never" and she sincerely hoped it was enough to stop more businesses going to the wall – but for some it won't be enough.

"Many, hospitality and accommodation businesses, most of them family-owned, have failed or been

severely damaged over the past 18 months.

"We await further detail on support for businesses when Auckland moves into the new framework and help that will target most affected businesses."

MYOB head of customer service Jo Tozer said after yesterday's Government announcement there were some unanswered questions regarding the transition from the phased ap-

proach within alert levels to the new protection framework.

"The decisions around vaccination certificates in the new framework will also be providing local SMEs with food for thought, especially with regard to further decisions around how the use of these could impact eligibility for financial support.

"In our latest MYOB Snapshot, 51 per cent said they wouldn't be asking customers or visitors to their work-

place to show proof of/confirm their vaccination status on entry, while just 28 per cent said they would.

"However, with the Government stance on this concept now clearer than before, we could see the approach amongst this group and the 21 per cent of business owners who were unsure, shift over the coming months."

Another positive from yesterday's announcement was the enhanced

economic support package and the doubling of the enhanced RSP and mental health support.

"Over a third of New Zealand's SMEs have experienced a mental health condition and more than two-thirds of businesses have told us that they are in favour of the Government providing funding for mental health initiatives for small business, so an initiative providing tailored support for some businesses is a welcome start."