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MEDIA RELEASE

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Issues with staffing continue to be the largest challenge to Bendigo businesses building back from the Covid pandemic, according to a survey undertaken this week by Be.Bendigo, Bendigo's Chamber of Commerce.

The survey responses came from a range of small, medium and larger businesses in the Bendigo area, and reflect various industry sectors, with a concentration from accommodation and food services, construction, health care and social assistance, and retail trade.

Responses indicated that the combination of unfilled staff vacancies and covid or flu-related staff absences were putting enormous pressure on many owners and other staff members, creating difficulties in maintaining "business as usual", and meaning that the opportunities to catch-up after Covid-related delays or to take full advantage of the tourist and visitor influx to Bendigo were being missed.

Retailers and food services providers also reported rising costs, including transport costs, were placing pressure on margins, further dampening turnover already impacted by lower foot traffic as a result of the pandemic and continuing "work from home" caused by isolation requirements.

With high vaccination levels in the community, Rob Herbert, CEO of Be.Bendigo, called on authorities to consider further relaxation of the current Covid isolation requirements.

"Whilst understanding that health risks remain, the vast majority of otherwise healthy people that we are hearing about with Covid, are appearing to be suffering relatively minor illness, and those in administrative or other roles that are technology-enabled, are often continuing to work effectively from home. It seems that this is prolonging the impact on those face-to-face businesses that suffered most during the harsher Covid restrictions, when there may be other measures that would reduce transmission risk to an acceptable level in most settings," he said.

"Businesses undertake "risk management" as a core component of their operations, and at the current stage, it is becoming increasingly difficult for them to see that there is the appropriate balance between Covid restrictions, and both the need and opportunity to restore normality to their operations."

Other respondents in construction and manufacturing also indicated that ongoing Covid-related supply chain issues with materials were also presenting challenges to their businesses. Mr Herbert indicated this was a further sign that there is optimism and potential for Bendigo businesses to grow and be more successful, and getting the settings right was important to this becoming a reality.

RELEASE ENDS

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