



The Courts' COVID-19 List has been expanded to assist families quickly resolve their disputes

The Family Court of Australia and the Federal Circuit Court of Australia (the Courts) remind family law practitioners and clients that the criteria for the highly successful national COVID-19 list has recently been expanded, to provide for a broader range of circumstances.

The Courts anticipate that the vaccination of children against COVID-19 may become an issue of dispute between separated parents and may require priority attention. In addition, families may be experiencing relatively sudden changes to their financial position as government support measures change.

These, and other types of issues that have arisen as a direct or indirect result of the pandemic, can be assessed and dealt with quickly through the Courts' COVID-19 list. In fact, of the 488 applications that have been made to the list since commencement in April 2020, the overwhelming majority have been accepted and heard by a Registrar or Judge within three business days of being assessed.

One of the benefits of the national list has been the ability to have them heard electronically from any location. Applications have been received from every major Registry, as well as from regional locations such as Albury, Dubbo, Mackay and Wollongong.

The Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia and Chief Judge of the Federal Circuit Court of Australia, the Hon Will Alstergren said that the COVID-19 list has received wide-spread support and praise from community legal and support services, advocates for victims of domestic violence, and the legal profession.

“The continuation and expansion of the COVID-19 list will provide families that are experiencing family law disputes that relate to the pandemic, with an avenue to have that specific issue heard and resolved quickly.

“This initiative is one of a number of critical projects that have and will continue to be implemented that aim to reduce waiting times for litigants, and in the coming months, I look forward to announcing further measures to simplify the process and better assist litigants,” Chief Justice Alstergren said.

Applications that meet the expanded COVID-19 criteria will be given a first return date before a National Registrar, Senior Registrar or a Judge within 3 business days of being considered by the National Registrar if assessed as urgent, or otherwise within 7 business days if priority but not urgent. Government funding has enabled the continuation of this initiative. The funding provides for Senior Registrar resources (that were not previously available) dedicated to hear interim contested issues in a more-timely manner.

More information and examples of applications that may be considered suitable for filing in the COVID-19 List is available from the websites of the [Family Court of Australia](https://www.familycourt.gov.au) and the [Federal Circuit Court of Australia](https://www.federalcircuitcourt.gov.au).