

Sunday, 9 January 2022

## Abandoned workers across the country forced to take leave with no pay.

Thousands of workers are isolating without pay and are unable to access Paid Pandemic Leave because of the Morrison Government's narrow definition of a 'close contact'.

The union movement is urging the Morrison Government to immediately change the definition of a 'close contact' to include contact with a COVID positive case that happens in the workplace. This will ensure that workers who are isolating or awaiting a test result can access Paid Pandemic Leave.

The changes to the definition of a close contact – announced by Scott Morrison - along with an overwhelmed PCR testing system and a critical shortage of rapid antigen tests has left, and will continue to leave, thousands of workers across the country unable to work and without pay.

The failure of the Morrison Government to ensure that rapid antigen tests are free and accessible means that workers are being exposed unnecessarily at work. This is compromising their safety and the ability of businesses, in particular small businesses, to simply stay open.

Recent retail spending figures show that Australia is effectively back in lockdown. Supply chains are being stretched as workers are isolating or have Covid which is causing huge disruption and inconvenience to Australians. This is resulting in violence and aggression being experienced by frontline retail workers across the country.

### Quotes attributable to Acting Secretary Liam O'Brien

"It is ridiculous to think that Omicron only spreads in the home and that only household contacts should be considered close contacts and eligible for payment. Workers are currently being forced into isolation without pay when exposed at work. This is ridiculous and dangerous.

"Australian workers are back in lockdown but this time there is no economic support available. With no money, how can Australian workers be expected to afford the overpriced and inaccessible RATs they require?"

"Scott Morrison's failure to secure free and accessible rapid tests is forcing Australia back into lockdown. Workplace close contacts must be able to access the same economic support as everyone else.

"Scott Morrison has a safe workplace, he and his workmates get free rapid tests whenever they need. Free and accessible rapid tests are the only way we keep workplaces safe, small businesses open and the community safe.

"Frontline workers are again bearing the brunt of this pandemic. Whether they be health workers caring for our vulnerable, or retail and supply chain workers keeping Australia fed. They deserve our respect. They should not be the subject of violence and abuse due to the government's failure to prepare for this."

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