

10 January 2022

Hon Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister of Australia
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

By email: john.kunkel@pm.gov.au; dlo@pm.gov.au

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to request an urgent meeting with myself and the leaders of unions representing essential workers to discuss the support needed for working people who are now on the front line of the Omicron crisis. In 2020 we were constantly meeting with your government to ensure that decision making included a consideration of issues affecting workers. This needs to be reinstated to ensure that decisions made that affect working people are made after consulting working people. Decisions impacting workers are better when workers' voices are included in the deliberations.

Right now, working people and their families are suffering, the toll is physical with so many sick; psychological with high levels of anxiety and uncertainty; and economic as businesses are again shutting down or reducing operations and workers are losing income. In addition, parts of our health care system are being overwhelmed and health care workers are exhausted, and now parts of supply chains are failing with so many workers sick at once. People are struggling to access tests, vaccines and now essentials in supermarkets.

The accelerating Omicron outbreak is a national crisis. It calls for national leadership. We need the support of our government to be able to keep the country going and at the same time to keep workers and the community safe.

At a minimum we need the following:

- 1. Rapid Antigen Tests to be free and accessible for all. Until supply has been resolved, they should be prioritised for frontline and essential workers.**

When supply issues are resolved, these need to be accessible in a safe manner, such as mailing them to homes and being access at testing hubs. We must avoid people who are infectious needing to attend businesses or pharmacies to access them, this is already a significant problem.

- 2. Paid pandemic leave must be extended to all close contacts. Close contacts must include those exposed at work, not just in households.**

The recent changes to the close contact definition do not make sense as a worker who spends all day with Covid positive work colleagues is now excluded from being considered a close contact and therefore excluded from paid pandemic leave.

- 3. Workers must be safe at work. Including mask requirements need to now be upgraded to N95 or P2 standard.**

Unions will not accept a watering down of OHS rights and obligations, we need protection during this pandemic, not more risk.

- 4. Broaden and increase support payments for workers, people out of work and businesses affected by COVID.**

A range of responses were developed in 2020-21 when working people found themselves losing income or their jobs because of businesses shutting down or reducing work. This is happening again and causing considerable economic stress. Most workers who have paid leave have now exhausted it, casual workers and sole traders have nothing.

We are able to meet at your first available opportunity given the urgency of the situation. As we did in 2020, we stand ready to work with Government to save lives and livelihoods.

Yours sincerely,



Sally McManus
Secretary