

Thursday, 13 January 2022

## National Cabinet must make Rapid Antigen Tests free, reject moves to water down workers' safety

Rumours continue to swirl about extreme elements of the employer lobby pushing hard for National Cabinet to water down Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) laws, in a desperate move to make up for the Morrison Government's total failure to make Rapid Antigen Tests free and accessible in Australia.

In the lead up to today's crucial meeting of the National Cabinet, employer groups and the Morrison Government continue to develop schemes to force workers to bear the cost of RATs, which are necessary to keep workplaces safe.

The Prime Minister is ignoring growing calls to make RATs freely available and easily accessible for all.

In response, some in the employer lobby have demanded to be indemnified if they refuse to provide tests to their workers, who are increasingly being required to report for duty to keep food on the shelves, medicines in stock and the economy ticking over, despite the risks presented by the highly infectious Omicron strain of the virus.

It appears the Prime Minister and the extreme elements of the employer lobby are planning to push the costs of RATs down onto the shoulders of working people, who have already carried more than their fair share of the burden of this pandemic, and at a time when workers are, once again, stepping up to help out their fellow Australians.

Employer and business groups have had ongoing, regular, and direct access to the Prime Minister and his Government. Despite the ACTU's requests, there has been no meeting with the representatives of the essential, frontline and supply chain workers that Australia's economy and health is depending on.

### Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary Sally McManus:

"National Cabinet must support free Rapid Antigen Tests for Australians and work out a way to distribute them without making sick people go to retail stores and pharmacies. They should also completely reject any attempt to water down workers' health and safety protections.

"The first priority of any Government should be to keep their citizens safe. We need the tools to achieve this, which are free and accessible Rapid Antigen Tests.

"The Morrison Government has refused all our attempts to meet and work together to find answers to this current crisis.

"The current conflict over this issue is a result of the Morrison Government's refusal to make Rapid Antigen Tests free. Employers do not want to pay, leaving the cost to be borne by individual workers.

“This is a mess that is avoidable. National Cabinet must agree to free Rapid Antigen Tests.

“Rapid Antigen Tests are an essential part of keeping workers and the whole community safe, and this is the only way that businesses will be able to stay open and function.

“The ideological position of this Government has been to “push through” and lecture workers about the need for a strong economy.

“Working people are suffering the outcomes of this stubborn ideological position, and the situation we are in is a stark and painful reminder that you can never have a healthy economy without a healthy workforce.”

**Media contact:** Isabella Tilley 0414 894 040