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## Disaster Payment cuts will hit frontline workers hardest

The decision by the Albanese Government to axe the Pandemic Leave Disaster Payment will mean a return to the earliest and most costly mistakes of the pandemic, with frontline healthcare workers and thousands of others forced to make impossible choices between obeying isolation rules and paying their bills.

With working people still required to isolate if they test positive it is essential that no one is asked to go a week without pay in order to keep the community safe.

Minister for Health and Aged Care Mark Butler said this morning that we are “still in a very serious phase of the pandemic” with almost 200,000 cases and more than 300 deaths recorded last week alone.

We are seeing variants emerge in the northern hemisphere which present a greater risk of reinfection and Minister Butler conceded that “all of the health authorities do expect there to be a third wave of Omicron over coming months”, saying Australians should be preparing for another wave of increased cases.

### Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O’Neil:

“The Albanese Government is warning Australians that the virus is still a serious threat and that we can expect more cases as we encounter new variants, but at the same time they are scrapping one of our best defences against new waves of infection.

“This decision will result in workers working while they are sick, which we have known since the first days of the pandemic is a certain way to more rapidly spread the virus and put more people at risk.

“It will also leave working people without paid leave to look after children or family members who are sick and need care.

“If we are asking people to isolate to keep the community safe then we need to ensure that they are supported to do that. No one should suffer such a big financial penalty for doing the right thing.

“The Albanese Government should not ignore the lessons that we have learnt since the start of the pandemic. They should reverse this decision and continue to support working people in the midst of an ongoing crisis.”

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