

Tuesday 11 January 2022

Unions call for emergency meeting with Prime Minister over Omicron crisis, lay out list of urgent actions needed for workers

Australian Council of Trade Unions Secretary Sally McManus wrote to the Prime Minister overnight, calling on him to convene an emergency meeting with union leaders representing essential workers to address the escalating national Omicron crisis.

The ACTU Secretary used her correspondence to the Prime Minister to lay out a list of demands on behalf of workers, who continue to battle on the front lines of the fight against the virus.

Ms McManus' demanded that:

1. Rapid Antigen Tests be made free and accessible for all Australians, as quickly as possible, with tests prioritised for frontline workers until current supply failures are resolved.
2. Paid Pandemic Leave be restored for workers who are close contacts with a work colleague, which was stripped from workers last week.
3. Workers be kept safe at work, including mask requirements to N95 or P2 standard, warning Scott Morrison that unions will fight any attempt to water down OHS laws.
4. The Morrison Government to restore income support for people who have been forced out of work and left without pay because of the onslaught Omicron, as well as financial assistance for businesses who have been devastated by the current outbreak.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary Sally McManus:

"I have called on the Prime Minister to convene an emergency meeting with the representatives of essential workers to hear directly from them on the actions needed to support workers at this time of crisis, which is inflicting a devastating toll on working people in this country. The Prime Minister has not heard from working people and we are on the front lines.

"Australian workers are not ok at the moment. We have never had so many working people sick at once. Healthcare workers are exhausted, people are anxious and uncertain. They want to know that their Government will hear them and act.

"Workers feel like they have been left to fend for themselves, sick people are hunting down non-existent tests, are waiting in long lines or have given up because they cannot afford the exorbitant prices. Many are losing pay while sick as they have no sick leave. Others are losing hours and their jobs as businesses close or cut back in what is turning into an unofficial lockdown.

“Working people need the support of their national government. The Prime Minister must give them the support they need to keep the country going, businesses open, the economy ticking over and, importantly, keeping us all safe.

“We are in a state of national crisis. It calls for national leadership. The national government must step it up and stand up for the working people of this country. That is what workers need and deserve.”

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