

Friday, 21 January 2022

Manufacturers and unions urge the Government to ensure Australia's domestic rapid antigen testing manufacturing capacity

Australia has always been a country that makes things.

We should be a country that makes high quality, high tech products that we need here for both Australian use and for export.

The consequences of Australia's depleted domestic manufacturing capacity have been laid bare by the COVID-19 pandemic: Australia was not able to manufacture surgical masks at the outset of the pandemic and we had to urgently develop the capacity to manufacture the latest vaccine technology onshore, leading to the production under licence of the AZ vaccine.

The predicament Australia now faces is that we are unable to procure enough rapid antigen tests to meet demand. The Government has simply ignored the need for RATs, which can and are being manufactured here, but for overseas markets. Australia has to resort to imported supplies while producers are experiencing unprecedented global demand, consequently leaving businesses, workers and the vulnerable in our community exposed to the virus.

Unions and manufacturers are united in our demand that Australia's ongoing domestic manufacturing capability provide the necessary tools to battle COVID and other infectious diseases. We believe it is in Australia's national interest that this is prioritised by the Government.

Rapid Antigen Tests are effective tools to identify people infected with COVID-19 and so help and support them to isolate and break the chains of transmission. This technology is essential to not only fight the current Omicron wave, but highlights the need for domestic production of these type of tests on a large scale for local use and export, especially in our region.

The Federal Government must make rapid antigen tests free and accessible to the community, including to small and medium sized businesses which will need to implement these tests as part of their work health and safety obligations. Discussions with local suppliers must be prioritised to ensure that Australia develops critical domestic manufacturing capability to fight COVID and future pandemics.

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