

URGENT: Covid-19 Safe Community Sector Leave

As the State Government has lead Victorians through the COVID-19 pandemic you have shown that you understand your responsibility to ensure every possible measure is taken to reduce the spread and protect vulnerable communities.

The ASU believes that this includes a special responsibility to ensure that the community sector agencies you fund are doing everything they can to ensure compliance with COVID-19 safe practices.

The health and wellbeing of community sector workers, vulnerable clients and fellow Victorians depend on it.

The ASU has a serious and growing concern with the way in which state funded community sector agencies have been responding to potential COVID-19 exposures at their sites. Of particular concern is community sector agencies requiring staff to use their personal leave to get tested and to isolate when they have been notified that they have been potentially exposed to COVID-19.

About 80% of community sector workers are covered by the SCHADS Award. This means that they only have access to 10 personal days leave per year. Roughly 87% of these workers are women, many of whom have caring responsibilities. It is simply not acceptable for state funded community sector agencies to demand that their staff who have been potentially exposed to COVID-19 at work to be required to access their limited and precious held personal leave.

It's also dangerous.

Any obstacle put in the way of a community sector worker at an agency funded by the state government could potentially lead to a chain of infections that prolongs Victoria's lockdown.

Along with a population prepared to comply with testing and isolation requirements, vaccination against COVID-19 is also a vital path back to some form of normality in Victoria.

It's vital that as many Victorians, including those in the community sector, get vaccinated against COVID-19.

Community sector workers are working harder than ever providing essential services such as advice about family violence, mental health, alcohol and other drugs and housing and homelessness. It's particularly difficult for them to get time away from work to get vaccinated.

ASU members request that the state government:

1. Mandate to funded agencies that a community sector worker required to test and isolate due to a potential COVID-19 exposure at work be granted paid leave in addition to any other leave until they are able to return to work
2. Ensure that two half days paid leave is provided to community sector to enable them to be vaccinated against COVID-19, as per that available to public sector workers
3. That this leave be paid for by the state government as the main/key funder of these agencies, so as to not impose further cost imposts on a sector that is already at breaking point and to ensure compliance.

The ASU believe that the state government should fund any additional costs that are incurred by funded agencies as a result of the additional costs above. Funded agencies are already struggling financially and any additional COVID – 19 costs would result in ASU members employed by these agencies paying the price by way of cost shifts to staff.

The ASU is happy to discuss this request at your earliest convenience.

To notify your availability to meet, please contact ASU Assistant Secretary Leon Wiegard on 0438 060 298 or via email at lwiegard@asuvictas.com.au.