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Tuesday, 1 March, 2022

The Commissioners  
Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and  
Exploitation of People with a Disability

Dear Commissioners

**Re: Statement of Ongoing Concern**

We refer to the Royal Commission's Statement of Ongoing Concern issued on 17 February 2022.

The Australian Services Union represents 135,000 members in the public, private and community sectors. Relevantly, we represent workers in the community and disability sector, including disability support workers and employees of disability advocacy services.

We share the Royal Commission's concerns about the impact of the Omicron Wave on people with disability.

Recently 906 ASU disability sector members responded to our survey about working in disability during the Omicron Wave.

The results show a system in crisis – 20% of members have contracted COVID-19 since November 2021 and 40% of members have been required to isolate as a close contact. Nearly 30% of isolating members could not access leave or any government payments of support.

Nearly 30% of members said they would leave the jobs in the next 12 months. Poor workplace culture and the risk of burnout as the most common reasons they intended to leave their work.

We enclose a briefing paper summarising the results of the survey with this letter. We hope it is proves useful when preparing the issues paper.

We will make detailed submissions once the paper has been released.

Yours faithfully

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**ASSISTANT NATIONAL SECRETARY**

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By your side



**Briefing note from Australian Services  
Union  
Disability services workers experience  
during Omicron wave**

# Survey of 906 disability services workers in Australia on their COVID experience since November 2021

## Survey sample:

- Survey was taken between 10 and 15 February 2022 of ASU members in Australia.
- 906 disability services members responded to the survey.

## Survey results:

### Employment status

- 51% are employed part time
- 32% are employed full time
- 14% are casual
- 21% are working multiple jobs

### Work location

- 6% are currently working from home
- 91% are attending the workplace to provide direct face to face client support
- 3% are attending the workplace but do not do any direct client care or support

### Vaccination status

- 65% have had a booster shot of a COVID vaccine, 33% have had 2 doses, <1% have had 1 dose, 2% have not had any doses

### Access to PPE at work

- Of those members attending their workplace to provide direct supports, 6% are not provided with any PPE. The vast majority are provided with face masks (76%) or N95 masks (47%), only 50% are provided with eye shields and 8% had to find and pay for their own PPE.

### COVID status

- Overall 20% of members have contracted COVID since November 2021(8% workplace transmission, 6% household transmission and 6% unknown transmission).
- Of those who have contracted COVID
  - 41% used personal leave for their recovery
  - 13% used another form of paid leave (eg. annual leave)
  - 19% did not have any paid leave and did not access any Government payments or support
  - 18% did not have access to any paid leave, but were able to access Government payments
  - 10% used special pandemic leave provided by their employer
  - 92% did not make a claim for workers compensation

### Isolation as a close contact

- 40% have had to isolate as a close contact since November. Of those isolating as a close contact, 19% were because of workplace exposure
- Of the workers who had to isolate as a close contact since November:
  - 9% accessed special paid isolation leave from their employer
  - 8% were able to work from home during their isolation period
  - 45% accessed another form of paid leave such as annual leave

- 11% had no access to leave, but did access Government payments
- 27% had no access to leave and did not access any Government payments or support

### **Number of time required to isolate**

- Since November, the number of times a respondent has had to isolate (either as a close contact or due to contracting COVID):
  - 56% required to isolate one time
  - 30% required to isolate two times
  - 8% required to isolate three times
  - 2% required to isolate four times
  - 3% required to isolate more than 5 times
  - 1% have not had to isolate
- As an asymptomatic close contact, 18% have been asked by their employer to leave isolation to work, and as a symptomatic close contact 3% have been asked to leave isolation to work.
- Of those asked by their employer to leave isolation to work, 10% of respondents did leave isolation to work, 8% refused on safety grounds, 3% refused due to being symptomatic or having caring responsibilities and 1% refused due to not having access to COVID testing

### **Working with COVID-positive clients**

- Since November, 24% of members have supported a client who they knew was COVID positive
- Of the workers who supported someone with COVID, nearly all were supplied with face masks (92%), but:
  - 74% were provided with eye protection
  - 38% were provided with access to rapid antigen tests
  - 20% received training in supporting someone with COVID
  - 10% were provided with additional supervision to support them with this work
  - 10% received extra pay for the skill it takes to support someone with COVID
  - 2% received extra pay if they contracted COVID or had to isolate after working with a client
  - 17% received payment for overtime worked

### **Rapid Antigen Tests**

- 45% of members are required to use RATs at their workplace. But of that group, 17% are required to source and pay for their own RATs, they are not provided by their employer.
- Just under half of all members (49%) have personal access to RATs at their home for themselves and their household

### **Disruption to work hours over summer**

- Since November, 33% of members have increased their hours at work. 16% have decreased their hours, the rest have stayed the same.
- 21% of members leave plans over summer have been disrupted, with 13% of members voluntarily changing leave plans to support continuity of service, 5% had their leave cancelled by their employer and 3% were asked to return early from leave.

### **Concerns about COVID and support from employers & government**

- 72% of members are concerned about getting COVID at work
- 79% of members are concerned about getting COVID at work and passing it onto their family and household
- 51% of members feel supported by their employer
- Only 15% of members feel supported by Government

**In twelve months' time from now**

- 14% plan on working for a different organisation
- 10% plan on working in a different industry
- 3% plan on retiring or leaving the workforce
- For those planning on moving jobs, the main reasons were:
  - 44% to leave a negative workplace culture
  - 18% to manage the risk of burnout
  - 12% to improve pay
  - 11% to improve job security or amount of work
  - 12% to access training or career advancement