

To: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet  
Cc: Department of Health; Treasury

21 May 2020

**RE: Australia needs a universal paid pandemic leave scheme to help avoid a 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of COVID-19**

We call upon the National Cabinet, the Federal Government and all state and territory governments to introduce a national paid pandemic leave scheme, administered by employers and funded by government. This is a critical public health intervention to guard against a second wave of infections, and needs to be implemented urgently.

Australia has been successful in limiting the spread of SARS-Cov-2 [COVID-19] by implementing a broad range of public health measures. A key aspect of the response has been to implement social distancing and to restrict substantial parts of the economy to reduce the risk of community transmission. As these restrictions begin to ease and Australians return to workplaces, the possibility of increased community transmission grows. It will be essential to maintain extensive testing, and isolation of actual and suspected cases in order to avoid a second wave of infections. Staying home when sick is one of the core messages promoted to the public to reduce the spread of this coronavirus.

Despite this messaging, it is well known that workers suffering from possible, and often mild, COVID-19 symptoms such as fever, dry throat and cough often attend work, presenting a significantly heightened risk of transmission. This risk of attending whilst sick increases in workers who have little or no access to paid sick leave.

The World Health Organization reports that in 2009, when the economic crisis and the H1N1 pandemic occurred simultaneously, an alarming number of employees without the possibility of taking paid sick leave attended work while sick. This allowed H1N1 to spread throughout their workplaces, causing the infection of some 7 million co-workers.<sup>1</sup>

In Australia, there are approximately 35% (or more than 3.6 million) workers in Australia have no access to sick leave<sup>2</sup>. A national paid pandemic leave scheme is essential to helping to avoid a serious resurgence of virus transmission. All workers must have access to paid leave, allowing 10 days over 12 months, to enable them to stay home when sick and to self-isolate until tested and confirmed free from the virus.

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<sup>1</sup> Scheil-Adlung, X. & Sandner, L., *The Case for Paid Sick Leave*, World Health Report (2010) Background Paper, No 9

<sup>2</sup> Links in text. 25% of workers were casual as at [August 2018](#). Casual workers have no sick leave entitlement. [Another million workers](#) are classified as independent contractors who also have no sick leave entitlements.

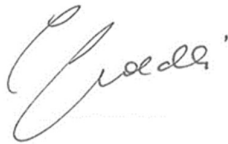
Signed:



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