

More Australian workers support November 20 public meeting to initiate united action to fight COVID-19

Our reporters
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Health workers, educators and other workers have denounced Australian governments' "let it rip" COVID-19 policies and enthusiastically endorsed the forthcoming meeting of the Health Workers Rank-and-File Committee (HWRFC) and the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), on Sunday, November 20 at 3 p.m. (AEDT).

The meeting will outline a political perspective, including the building of independent rank-and-file committees, to unify health workers, teachers and other sections of workers in the fight for decent wages, working conditions and the elimination of COVID-19.

This week, the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) published a video of health workers and educators explaining the necessity for a unified fightback by all sections of the working class.

We urge readers to share this video on social media, read the October 13 joint statement issued by the CFPE and HWRFC, and register here to attend the online public meeting.

Petra, a tertiary educator, who will be attending the November 20 meeting:

SARS-CoV-2 is classed as a biohazard level 3 pathogen requiring laboratory staff to wear PPE when working with the virus. Staff in biohazard level 3 labs wouldn't be allowed to let their children run free at their workplace, yet parents all over the country are forced to expose their kids to the virus without any protection.

Families who wish to protect themselves and vulnerable family members are unable to do so because of the government's decision to let SARS-CoV-2 run rampant, in the full knowledge that it may kill people with disability, immunocompromised people and the very elderly.

My stepfather died of hospital-acquired SARS-CoV-2 in August this year. He'd been looking forward to being discharged to go home to his wife, when his treating doctor, who had not complied with the mask mandate, became sick with COVID. Instead of being discharged, my stepfather was tested and moved to the COVID Ward, where he fought for his life for the next nine days, sadly unsuccessfully. Instead of preparing for her husband's return home, my mum had to

organise his funeral.

And what about our children? Research suggests that repeat SARS-CoV-2 infections have a weakening impact on the immune system. Children are susceptible to Long-COVID. What are we going to tell them in ten years' time, when they ask why we did not protect them from lifelong organ damage? Will telling them "we wanted to help the economy" make our children understand that we had their best interests at heart when we followed government instructions? I very much doubt it.

For me, the past three years have been a mixed bag of face-to-face and online work and, most recently, unemployment. When it became clear last December that the government aimed for unmitigated COVID spread, I felt I had to decide whether to risk my health for the sake of financial stability or to make it through these times of unmitigated COVID spread by not working and living off my savings. I opted for the latter. I miss working and would love to be part of the workforce again, but not at present, when work health and safety are clearly not a priority for governments and employers.

The fight for decent wages, conditions and safety measures was traditionally fought by joining a union. When the government did away with mandatory isolation and pandemic payments, there ought to have been an outcry by workers' unions to call for the re-instatement of worker protection. However, all we heard from Australian unions was silence, and what's more, complicity, in the form of an earlier call by a union boss to do away with mandatory isolation. Just savour that fact for a moment: The Health Services Union boss calls for a scrapping of worker protection! George Orwell could not have thought it up better.

My trust in the institution of which I have been part for most of my working life since 1978 has been eroded. Unions have ousted themselves as what they are—employers' foot soldiers, complicit with the goals of those against whom they should stand up to protect workers. I shall be saving my future hard-earned money—no union is going to see a cent of it.

Mary, a health administration worker from New South Wales:

The Labor government, through the secretive National Cabinet, has abolished the last of any mitigation measures against COVID and ended the mandatory isolation of people suffering from acute COVID infection. These “let it rip” policies are being implemented by the trade unions, leaving millions of workers at risk of death and/or Long-COVID.

The risk is very real and the dangers greater than at any time since the pandemic began, due to multiple simultaneously circulating variants, each more immune evasive than the last. Teachers and health care workers are like sitting ducks, waiting to be infected.

We are at the absolute frontline of the pandemic. Educators and health workers have shown amazing resolve to fight, but the unions are isolating us from one another.

Only the working class can organise coordinated action to eliminate COVID once and for all, uniting with workers here and internationally. Please join us in this historic struggle.

Maddie, a hospitality worker in Sydney, New South Wales:

I got the newest wave [of COVID] because once the borders opened people have been travelling non-stop and bringing all the new strains to hotels and tourism businesses.

It's really tough because we can't even get any financial support anymore as we're not considered high risk, even though I'm a spa therapist and we have to come in direct contact with people every day.

As soon as I tested positive, I was legally required to give up the 25 hours I was supposed to work that week. I am not homeless right now only because I'm renting from a friend, so they didn't kick me out when I couldn't pay rent. I was happy to isolate, but I didn't get any kind of compensation for that time because I'm casual.

Jenny, a retired worker from Queensland:

Uniting nurses and teachers against COVID and dreadful wages and conditions is really important. They need their own rank-and-file committees to unite their struggles against “living with” this constantly mutating virus, and to start connecting with nurses and teachers around the world who are suffering from the same ruthless policies.

I didn't know that state governments have been fining unions for striking—that's tantamount to outlawing industrial action. To punish striking sounds like another step toward a police state. Rank-and-file committees are crucial to unite workers because the unions have proven they work for employers and hoard union dues.

I'm very angry that the Albanese government has lifted practically all COVID safety measures. Since late last year, Australia's pandemic response has followed “worst practice.” The first year and a half of the pandemic, it was effective. We were even able to get information about the number of infections in our local LGA. That information was vital,

especially for immunocompromised people like me. If you know the degree of spread, you can make informed decisions.

Everyone wore masks when it was mandated. Now, virtually no-one wears a mask which means the immunocompromised and elderly are in even more danger, made worse by the National Cabinet deciding to drop isolation requirements. We didn't get a say in that, did we? They hold their closed-door meetings and make decisions that will kill thousands more. Letting the virus spread like this is social murder.

Principled epidemiologists are really worried about new mutations of the virus, but they don't appear on television anymore. You have to turn to medical journals or Twitter to find out what's really going on because we are now told nothing!

I worked very hard over the last two and a half years to protect myself and my now-departed mother from COVID. I had to fight every day for aged care service providers to wear decent masks when they came to the house. Eventually I stopped the providers from coming and did everything myself. We couldn't trust them anymore because of the mixed messages the government was putting out and the service provider wouldn't supply their staff with N95s.

Health workers and teachers are suffering. Workers in both sectors are expected to fill the shortfall of staff by working longer hours. I've spent a lot of time in hospitals over the last six years advocating for my mother and it was obvious to me that hospital staff are struggling. The impact of fatigue and demoralisation because of underfunding and understaffing must be addressed. Nobody should have to work to the point of exhaustion to keep a roof over their heads.

They truly have been the ‘heroes’ of the pandemic, and of my own painful losses, but they are not treated like that by governments, who only pay lip service to their self-sacrifices.



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