

## Vital supports are necessary as COVID cases soar

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Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF) is urging all political leaders and the Federal Government to respond to calls for COVID emergency measures to be continued over winter.

The CHF CEO, Leanne Wells said that while these supports were temporary, the surge in COVID cases is cause for extending critical assistance.

"It is concerning that three measures that are effective in slowing COVID transmission in vulnerable communities have been discontinued," said Ms Wells.

Emergency leave payments for COVID isolation, free access to Rapid Antigen Tests for people who need it most, and long telehealth phone consults have been discontinued by the Federal Government, but health experts and community organisations say that now is not the time to remove these options.

"Reinstating these measures over the short term will support efforts to manage the new COVID surge and help the most vulnerable Australians respond to health advice," said Ms Wells.

"In the face of this crisis, we need to recognise that people's circumstances can be very different, and it is important to use these tools to ease the burden on people who can least afford to cope with increasing exposure to COVID infections, said Ms Wells.

"The supports in question are critical for people to take more personal responsibility in managing COVID outbreaks," said Ms Wells.

"Suppressing COVID transmission is crucial to containing the virus and slowing the evolution of dangerous variants," said Ms Wells.

"The long-term effects of more COVID infections should also not be overlooked," said Ms Wells.

"Leave payments for people isolating due to COVID are especially important for workers who can't afford to take time away from work."

"Access to free RAT tests also allows the community to be proactive in helping to slow virus transmission," she said.

"Long telehealth consults by phone are the only way some patients can have a long consultation," said Ms Wells. Long consultations are needed in many situations, and with new

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COVID waves, people with multiple health conditions should not have access to their doctor restricted," she said.

"Parts of Australia do not have effective internet coverage for video telehealth yet, and older people, people with disability or other issues with access to high-speed internet need to be able to access these longer appointments," said Ms Wells.

"This is especially important for prescribing anti-virals as longer consultations are needed for GPs to check medications for interactions," she said.

Ms Wells welcomed the National Cabinet Meeting next Monday and said that she hoped that State and Federal leaders can find ways to work together to ensure timely and important supports are in place to relieve the burden on the most vulnerable in our community.

Ms Wells said that it is pleasing that NSW State Government has been able to continue programs for free Rapid Antigen Tests to multicultural communities, people with disabilities, people accessing homeless services and young people in out-of-home care.

"We hope that decision-makers work together to find ways to provide cohesive action to reduce the harm for all."

"We urge the Government to consider timing, health expert advice and take the long view when making decisions that impact the health of the community, said Ms Wells.

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