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**RAIL, TRAM AND BUS UNION**

**RTBU Launches campaign to protect COVID-vulnerable workers**

*January 17, 2021*

The RTBU has launched a national campaign to better protect workers who are at significant risk of death or serious illness from COVID-19.

RTBU National Secretary Mark Diamond today said while progress on an effective vaccine was encouraging, the current outbreak in Greater Sydney and emergence of a new highly infectious variant demonstrated the pandemic was far from over.

“During the pandemic, many of us have embraced zoom meetings and invested in a home office. We’ve been able to stay safe, secure and out of harm’s way,” Mr Diamond said.

“But for many other workers in sectors like health, aged care, emergency services, retail and transport, however, working from home is not an option. For workers in those sectors who are also elderly or have pre-existing health conditions, going to work during an outbreak of COVID-19 could mean putting their life on the line.”

Mr Diamond said safety net programs such as JobKeeper, JobSeeker and pandemic leave did not cover the specific needs of COVID-vulnerable workers.

“As the Federal and State Government’s plot a path to the end of the pandemic, it is important we make sure no Australian is left behind or left exposed. That means putting in place a COVID-Vulnerable Worker Payment to enable workers who are at high-risk risk to voluntarily stay home during a localised outbreak of COVID-19.

“The payment should enable those workers to continue to be paid their full salary by their employer, but it should be funded by the Federal Government.”

Mr Diamond said to be categorised as a ‘COVID-Vulnerable Worker’ and therefore be eligible for the scheme, a worker must fall into one of the categories listed as ‘at risk’ by the Australian Government Department of Health.

Consideration should also be given to extending this to pregnant workers, and workers who have a medical reason for not wearing a mask.

For more information about the COVID-Vulnerable worker campaign and to access an animated video go to [www.covidvulnerableworker.com.au](http://www.covidvulnerableworker.com.au)

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