

Wednesday 19 January 2022

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Update 67

Code Brown: what it means for members and the health system

The Andrews Government has declared a 'code brown' for the Victorian public health system. ANMF had been calling for this response because it acknowledges the statewide crisis facing our members. It sends a message to the public about the extreme pressure the system is under so they understand services will not look like business as usual and they should be preparing their own COVID plan. Importantly a code brown triggers the ability for statewide co-ordination of the provision and rationing of health services and patient allocations to support the workforce.

Hospitalisations are anticipated to peak by mid-February. This will be a very tough few weeks for members. ANMF has held more than 30 public sector hospital-wide member meetings. We are working with members to resolve the issues raised and implement as many suggestions as possible to ease the pressures.

ANMF seeking closer code brown communication with employers

ANMF is writing to all public health service employers seeking to strengthen our regular and cooperative meetings, consultations, and communications. We are seeking consultation on any code brown plans and directions.

Employers must continue to consult with ANMF, our Job Reps, HSRs and members in relation to the introduction of surge workforce models. This is to ensure every avenue is exhausted to fill rosters and ratios before moving to a surge model. These models will not be in place for a day longer than required.

Can I be forced to give up my leave or return from leave?

At this stage we have not seen any document that provides evidence of this. All of ANMF's communication with employers, management, the Victorian health department and the Andrews Government is emphasising the extreme burnout and exhaustion of the workforce. We are strongly recommending any recall from leave must be a respectful conversation and must protect the remaining goodwill of nurses and midwives.

Seek ANMF Member Assistance if you need advice and support regarding an annual leave recall direction.

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What about nurses and midwives on parental leave, long service leave and WorkCover?

ANMF is heartened by the increasing number of members on parental and long service leave contacting Member Assistance seeking advice about returning to work to help with the surge workforce. Members are telling us they are concerned for their colleagues. ANMF is also aware of members on WorkCover returning to help in areas such as the Hospital in the Home virtual ward.

The following frequently asked questions may be useful. Members in this situation are encouraged to contact Member Assistance for further advice specific to your circumstances via <https://anmfvic.asn.au/memberassistance>

Can I do a shift to help out while on parental leave?

Yes, you can do up to 10 day's work in each 12 months of parental leave. These are called 'keeping in touch days' in most EBAs and the National Employment Standards

You can also request 'flexible parental leave' meaning you may take up to 30 days of your long parental leave entitlement, allowing you (for example) to work one or two days a week and remain on parental leave the other days. Technically you are meant to give 10 weeks' notice, but in the circumstances ANMF would expect employers to facilitate earlier utilisation of this entitlement.

Can I do a shift to help out if I am on long service leave?

Yes, by agreement with your employer. In effect each day of long service leave that you forego to pick up a shift would be added back to your long service leave balance. Technically long service leave must be taken in one or more weeks, rather than days, so an alternative may be to work some shifts one week and be on long service leave the next and so on.

Can I do a shift to help out while on workers compensation?

Yes, if your treating practitioner provides a certificate of capacity stating that you are fit to that work, subject to any conditions in the certificate of capacity.

Can I do a shift to help out while on annual leave?

Yes, it would simply add a day back into your accrued annual leave for each day that you work (please note if you are a Monday-Friday non shift worker this may have a consequent effect on annual leave loading for each day of annual leave converted back to a working shift). If it is a day that you wouldn't work ordinarily, then you would still receive your leave payment and be paid extra for the additional shift.

I am worried about redeployment, patient care and my registration?

ANMF is receiving inquiries from members understandably anxious about redeployment.

Even before the code brown, employers were able to redeploy nurses and midwives from their usual clinical area to other parts of the healthcare service to manage COVID patient hospitalisations and non-COVID patient pressures. **It is still expected that employers will provide orientation and support as part of redeployment.**

Everyone understands this is a once in a century crisis. The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) has acknowledged 'COVID-19 is posing unprecedented challenges to the health system, health practitioners and the wider community.'

NMBA fact sheets and information provides clarification and support for nurses and midwives working in the COVID-19 context. This communication reiterates the importance of maintaining professional standards and

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standards of care. The nursing and midwifery workforce is highly skilled at changing clinical practice context and reflecting on and assessing practice, competence and scope.

These fact sheets are available via <https://bit.ly/2JEU9Cn>

During peak COVID-19 response periods nurses and midwives, as always, will rely on clear, accessible, and up-to-date local policies, procedures and clinical practice guidelines. Employers must make these materials and education available so that nurses and midwives can appropriately assess their scope of practice. Employers must also communicate with members on legislative requirements, current context of practice, authorisation, and organisation support. The NMBA advise that:

'Scope of practice should be managed between health practitioners, their employers, supervisors and colleagues. Health services can rotate nursing and midwifery staff as necessary, but must ensure that they are working in roles that they have been educated in, trained in and are competent in. Where appropriate, they will also need to be receiving adequate supervision.' Source: Nursing and Midwifery Board, Ahpra, Fact Sheet Nurses and/or midwives changing their clinical context of practice in response to COVID-19 via <https://bit.ly/2JEU9Cn>

What about other nurses and midwives?

ANMF believes more can be done to utilise other nurses and midwives.

If you are on the sub-pandemic register or believe you should be on the sub pandemic register and would like to work in a hospital (and are fully vaccinated) fill in this this surge workforce form via <https://anmfvic.asn.au/surge>

If you are currently working outside the public health system but wish to work in the public health system (and are fully vaccinated) complete this form via <https://anmfvic.asn.au/surge>

Retired nurses can also assist with expansion of the vaccination workforce so that more experienced registered nurses and midwives can return to their wards and units. See newsflash #65 via <https://bit.ly/3AqgB7b>

My employer says the special paid leave for isolation is not retrospective. Is this true?

No and we are urging health services to treat our members with respect and compassion. ANMF has confirmed with the Victorian Department of Health that public sector members are entitled to special paid leave for quarantine required if you need to isolate or if you test positive to COVID-19. We have also confirmed this is retrospective to 1 January 2022 – when it seems employers started changing their application of this leave. For further information read newsflash 64a via <https://bit.ly/3qBdu8V> . Health services will be notified of this as soon as today.

We continue to strongly encourage private, not-for profit and local government employers to take care of their nurses, midwives and personal care workers by following the public sector special leave guidance, however we cannot enforce this.

It's a race: get your third dose done

Victorian nurses, midwives and personal care workers are required to have their third dose of the vaccine.

ANMF encourages all members – nurses, midwives and personal care workers – to have their third dose as soon as you are eligible to ensure you are protected from severe illness, hospitalisation and death.

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On 19 January the Victorian Government announced an immediate reduction of the interval between doses to from four months to three months.

Public sector nurses and midwives can access four hours leave to have their vaccination and up to two days special leave if symptoms after receiving your vaccine prevent you from attending work. The public sector enterprise agreement personal leave evidence requirements apply. ANMF strongly encourages all local government, private and not-for-profit to follow the public sector special paid leave for vaccination, but it is not enforceable.

Your deadline will depend on your eligibility and your second dose deadline:

12 February 2022 deadline – nurses, midwives and carers who are eligible for a third dose on or before 12 January 2022.

1 March 2022 deadline – residential aged care nurses and personal carer workers who are not yet eligible for their third dose must have it within three months and two weeks of the second dose deadline which was 15 November 2021.

29 March 2022 deadline – nurses and midwives working in hospitals and healthcare services who are not yet eligible for their third dose must have it within three months and two weeks of the second dose deadline which was 15 December 2021.

Book your third dose

Federal Government 'find a clinic' (chemists and medical clinics) <https://bit.ly/3Eiz7yp>

Victorian Government hubs and pop ups <https://bit.ly/3dZjuC6>

Emergency accommodation for healthcare workers

The Victorian Government provides the 'frontline accommodation program' for health care workers if they need support to quarantine or isolate safely. Private aged care nurses and personal care workers are eligible to access this program. For details <https://bit.ly/2X6cABJ>

\$450 test and isolation payment

The Victorian Government provides a \$450 test and isolation payment to workers required to isolate after taking a COVID-19 test who don't have access to paid leave. This payment can only be claimed following a PCR test. More information, eligibility, and applications <https://bit.ly/3fWygqQ>

\$750 disaster leave payment

The Federal Government provides a \$750 disaster leave payment if you tested positive or were identified as a close contact and must isolate for 7 days. Advice of a positive PCR test or evidence of registering a RAT test is required. Private aged care workers are eligible for the payment if you do not have access to paid leave during your isolation period. Call 180 22 66 to make a claim. More information, eligibility, and applications <https://bit.ly/3bWnfXG>

Need ANMF advice or support?

Members can complete an online Member Assistance inquiry form via anmfvic.asn.au/memberassistance (scroll to the bottom of the page).

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COVID stressed?

While it may feel easier in the short term to muddle through, Nursing and Midwifery Health Program CEO and registered nurse Glenn Taylor says this coping strategy has its limitations. Members are encouraged to contact the free, confidential NMHPV service staffed predominantly by mental health nurses, as well as nurses and midwives with counselling training. One chat may help to reset and decide on some healthy strategies, or you may need ongoing support.

Contact NMHPV on 9415 7551 or email admin@nmhp.org.au. Find out more <https://www.nmhp.org.au>

(Please note the NMHPV is a counselling support service, they cannot provide furloughing or employment advice – for this advice complete an ANMF member assistance form.)

ANMF Job Reps and Health and Safety Reps are encouraged to display this newsflash on their workplace noticeboard.

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