

TELSTRA SEEKS TO MANDATE VACCINATION

9 September 2021

Telstra has notified the Union of its intentions to seek to mandate COVID-19 vaccinations for parts of their workforce, including those where:

- You frequently interact with customers and other members of the public;
- You are required to work in high-risk locations with vulnerable persons or in locations that might lead to COVID-19 outbreaks if infected people come into contact with members of the public (eg. Medical facilities, aged care centres, schools, shopping centres, indigenous communities);
- You are required to attend work (ie. You cannot work from home) and work in close proximity with other employees or customers; and
- Government/health regulations stipulate that you must be vaccinated to enter a location or premises.

Under the proposal, employees would have until Friday 15 October to receive their first dose, and must receive their second by Monday 15 November. Telstra will accommodate exceptions if workers are unable to secure bookings by these dates.

As we explained in our message to members last week, the Union supports our members having the choice as to whether or not they are vaccinated – not because it is a popular view amongst some of our members, but because it is based on the current public health advice.

We will continue to advocate for and defend our members' right to that choice so long as the public health advice is that choice remains reasonable, manageable and inconsequential to the interests of public health – and will engage with Telstra to identify any opportunities to mitigate against the impacts of this proposal.

However, for those without medical contraindications, mandate or no mandate, we will continue to strongly encourage vaccination. According to the latest research published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, two doses of the vaccines currently available in Australia remain considerably effective against infection by the Delta Strain – 88% in the case of the Pfizer vaccine and 67% in AstraZeneca.

It is simple logic that if you are less likely to be infected with COVID-19 in the first place, then you are less likely to transmit the virus to your family, colleagues and the broader community.

The vaccines are now also backed by a Commonwealth no-fault indemnity scheme – the first of its kind in Australia.

That's why despite defending choice, we will continue to strongly encourage members who can be vaccinated, to be vaccinated.

As the consultation process has not yet commenced, we have yet to understand the full implications of the proposed policy and the scope of members impacted. We are scheduled to meet with Telstra tomorrow, 7 September, in order to commence that consultation process. However, in very short preliminary talks this morning, Telstra has confirmed that the proposed policy will not require those with valid medical exemptions to be vaccinated, but will be accommodated in roles which do not fall into the categories noted above.

That is at odds with public statements made today by CEO Andy Penn.

In the meantime, Telstra has provided us with a copy of the proposed policy and we have sought formal advice from our solicitors on the legality of the entire proposal and its interaction with legislation and other workplace policies, including the long term medical restrictions policy.

Where the policy contradicts the law, it will be opposed. This is particularly so for those with valid medical contraindications.

Unlike Mr Penn, the majority of our members have been on the front-lines of this pandemic response putting their safety, and that of their families, at risk so that people in situations like his can continue working from the safety of their homes. If he thinks he can sack those same essential workers who may have genuine medical exemptions, he is sorely mistaken.

We already know the law does not provide for this, public health measures do not provide for this and we will be strongly challenging this position.

Once that legal advice is in hand, it will be shared in its entirety with members.

We will keep members posted on this matter as further information becomes available.

In the meantime, if you require any further information please contact your State Branch Official on (08) 8443 7389.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Nick Townsend', written over a faint circular stamp or watermark.

Nick Townsend
BRANCH SECRETARY