

AEU NT Member Bulletin 9/2021

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COVID-19 vaccination – paid leave available

Have you received your COVID-19 vaccination yet?

[According to official data](#), as of 1 August, 42% of NT residents over the age of 16 had received at least one dose, with that number rising to almost 71%



among the most vulnerable age group of over 70s.

The figures show there is a much higher vaccination rate in Darwin than in regional and remote NT. According to the NT Government, this is [mainly to do with supply and the logistical challenges](#) of administering the vaccine in remote communities.

The AEU NT encourages members who have not yet been vaccinated to consider doing so. Whilst it is ultimately an individual decision, and one for which you may wish to seek individual medical advice, the vaccines available are the best weapon we have for individuals, especially those in high-risk categories, to protect themselves and those around them from serious illness or death arising from coronavirus. It is also clear from the decisions of National Cabinet that high rates of vaccination are the crucial ingredient in ending the current snap lockdowns and hot spot declarations.

AEU NT members working for the Department of Education should be aware that paid leave is available to access a vaccine appointment. The Commissioner for Public Employment issued the following statement on 3 June authorising NTPS employees to apply for paid miscellaneous leave of up to three hours to attend a COVID-19 vaccination appointment:

“Employees may access paid miscellaneous leave for the purposes of receiving the COVID-19 vaccination. They may be required, on return to the workplace, to provide reasonable documentary evidence (i.e. copy of their COVID-19 vaccination passport or a medical certificate issued by a registered health practitioner). The paid miscellaneous leave is only approved for the duration of the medical appointment at which the employee is receiving the COVID-19 vaccination and reasonable travel time. It does not include any other leave for any other purpose.

“Approval of paid miscellaneous leave is at the discretion of the authorised delegate and will count as service for all purposes. Where an employee requires further leave, for example due to sickness after receiving the

COVID-19 vaccination, existing leave provisions and conditions apply. Employees wishing to understand their existing leave provisions and conditions should contact the Workforce Relations team with the Department of Corporate and Digital Development.”

If you have questions about this process or are having difficulties arranging an appointment, especially if you are based in a remote community, please contact the union office for further advice.

For more information about vaccines and to book an appointment, [visit the NT Government’s COVID19 website](#).

Working from home and quarantine arrangements for school-based staff

Over the past week our officers have held discussions with the Commissioner for Public Employment and the Deputy Chief Executive about work arrangements for school-based staff who are required to undertake mandatory supervised quarantine or home quarantine due to government health orders. This is an important discussion because all indications are the current political environment of snap lockdowns whenever community transmission of the virus occurs is likely to continue into 2022, impacting on the upcoming Term 3 and end of year school holidays.

In our view, the [current arrangements](#) are unduly inflexible, potentially unfair to school-based employees (who cannot access recreation leave during term time) and have not been properly updated since the early days of the pandemic to account for changes in government health orders and containment strategies.

In many cases, there has been a presumption by the employer that school-based employees impacted by hotspot declarations are automatically placed on leave without pay, even when they travelled interstate to a location that was not a hotspot when they left and whose status was changed at short notice. In some cases, employees return to the NT to find an area has retrospectively been declared a hotspot and they are required to quarantine.

In these situations, the AEU NT believes there should at least be scope to consider the equivalent of working from home arrangements whilst members are required to quarantine. Whilst there is no guarantee of this being approved, if you are impacted, we advise you to contact the office for advice and advocacy, and to follow these steps if considering travel:

- Carefully consider the need to travel interstate, recognising that you may need to quarantine at your own cost on your return.
- Always travel with your teacher laptop and access to your teaching and learning resources
- If you get caught up by a hotspot declaration, and wish to work remotely whilst undertaking quarantine, make an application for “Working from home” for all or part of the time detained.

Enterprise bargaining update

Negotiations for a new agreement covering teaching staff continues at a good pace, with the latest discussions on our claims covering areas such as class sizes and ratios, non-contact time, workload reduction and professional development days.

The Government has not shifted from its stance of imposing a four-year pay freeze on all public sector workers. The pay freeze was part of the Commissioner’s formal offer to employees at Jacana Energy and Power and Water Corporation. These offers have been rejected by the unions covering those employees. Employee support will soon be tested if the offer is put to an employee ballot. Negotiations for the general NTPS agreement covering workers across many agencies, including school-based admin officers, are also close to conclusion.

We anticipate that the substantive elements of teacher bargaining should be concluded by October, when the agreement expires. We will continue to keep members informed of developments. For more detailed updates, you can request an appointment via your workplace rep with union officers for a face-to-face or virtual meeting with your sub-branch, or attend a Regional Council meeting. If you have not already done so, we encourage you to [read our log of claims](#).

Festival of Teaching – early bird regos end 16 August

The AEU NT Branch is proud to sponsor the upcoming Festival of Teaching, the NT's premier professional learning conference for educators.

The [Festival of Teaching](#) has 58 sessions on offer that cover a variety of curriculum areas and all stages of schooling. The key details are as follows:

- Saturday 28 August, Palmerston College 10-12 Campus, Tilston Ave, Palmerston
- Keynote speakers: Dr Miriam-Rose and Karen Young
- Early bird tickets close 16/8: \$40 PTANT members, \$100 non-members

View the [program here](#) and [register here](#).

Update on outcome of Milingimbi ICAC report

Since damning revelations about corruption by a former Milingimbi principal were published by the NT ICAC, AEU officers and other key stakeholders have held several conversations with the Department's Chief Executive about addressing the underlying problems this incident exposed.

The Chief Executive informed us she is awaiting formal correspondence from the ICAC office with its recommendations, however those recommendations are accepted in principle. The Chief Executive has proposed that the School Education Advisory Group, consisting of representatives from the Department, the AEU, the NT Principals' Association, NT COGSO and the education minister's office, work together on implementing a response.

The AEU NT has agreed to participate in this process. A major focus for the union will be improving the Department's internal complaints process. As we [stated in our initial response](#), early warning signs existed in Milingimbi in 2017 which were identified by AEU members and conveyed by AEU officers to the Department, however employees who made complaints were subject to bullying by the principal instead of being protected and the resulting investigation was inadequate. Our view is that the problems in Milingimbi could have been prevented much earlier with a more robust approach by the Department.

We welcome comments from the new ICAC Commissioner, [Michael Riches, who stated](#) this week: "I will drive a renewed focus on working with agencies to improve their integrity. I am firmly of the view that agency heads are responsible for ensuring their agency operates with integrity and that processes are in place to ensure that those who choose to operate without integrity will be identified and dealt with. I see my role as working with those agencies to assist in that objective, whether that be through education, evaluations or oversight."

Update from Teachers Health on services during pandemic

Teachers Health, the allied health fund for AEU members and their families, has [issued an update](#) for its members in response to the latest lockdown. Among many other things, lockdowns complicate people's ability to access health services, with everything from a routine visit to the GP to major surgery affected. Our thoughts are especially with our colleagues in the Greater Sydney area.

Let us know ASAP if your workplace, contact details or income have changed

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