



17 AUG, 2021

Cash calls for industry debate on job mandate

Sydney Morning Herald, Sydney

Page 1 of 2

WORKPLACE VACCINATION

Cash calls for industry debate on job mandate

Nick Bonyhady
Industrial relations reporter

Industrial Relations Minister Michaelia Cash has called a meeting of employer associations and unions to find common ground on mandatory workplace coronavirus vaccinations.

A dozen major employer organisations including the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Australian Resources and Energy Group, and Council of Small Business Organisations of Australia have been invited to the meeting tomorrow, which will also cover the general rollout.

But unions will use the meeting to push universal paid vaccination leave so workers, including casuals, don't have to lose income or use up other time off to get vaccinated.

Figures compiled by the Australian Council of Trade Unions suggest 1.6 million people have already been given some form of vaccination leave by their employers, including major brands such as Woolworths and Westpac.

The ACTU's paid leave proposal would go further than many of those companies. All workers, regardless of income, would get two days paid leave per dose to cover vaccination appointments and any immediate side effects.

ACTU boss Sally McManus called on the federal government to legislate the plan even if only on

a temporary basis to cover the vaccine "sprint" later in the year.

"We know that, especially for people who are in insecure work and have no paid leave entitlements, worrying about losing income because of side effects or in order to get the vaccination is a barrier for them," Ms McManus said.

"It's part of a national crisis measure to do everything we can to support the vaccination drive."

About 47 per cent of people over 16 have had at least one dose of a vaccine.

The debate about mandatory vaccinations has swept into public view over the past fortnight because businesses such as food manufacturer SPC, which sees them as a key way of keeping staff safe and facilities operating, know mandates take months to put in place.

Several employer and union sources confirmed Senator Cash, who is also Attorney-General, had called a meeting for tomorrow morning to discuss the vaccine rollout and workplace jobs.

A dozen industry associations have been invited along with a corresponding number of unions for the closed-door meeting.

Attendees, who were not authorised to speak on the record ahead of the meeting, said they did not expect a breakthrough because of differing opinions both between em-



17 AUG, 2021

Cash calls for industry debate on job mandate

Sydney Morning Herald, Sydney

Page 2 of 2

ployer groups and within the government about whether vaccines should ultimately be encouraged or mandated.

A spokesman for Senator Cash urged businesses and unions to collaborate to encourage vaccination and congratulated businesses that were granting paid leave for it.

“Under existing arrangements, employers are not required to provide workers with paid leave to get vaccinated. However, the government strongly encourages all employers to provide flexibility and support, including leave arrangements, to allow their employees to be vaccinated,” he said.

A survey of 1500 employers made public yesterday by the Victorian chamber of commerce found 45 per cent supported mandatory vaccination as a condition of employment, 28.5 per cent supported it for some professions and 22 per cent were opposed.



Michaelia Cash
has asked for a
meeting.