

Kenyataan / Statement

8th January 2021

Make Rapid Antigen Tests Free for All

Malaysian Progressives in Australia are concerned that international students and temporary visa holders throughout Australia would be excluded from affordable COVID-19 testing, at a time where cases have skyrocketed across Australia. This concern is based on the recent [National Cabinet announcement](#) that free Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) will only be available for those with concession cards. This concern is compounded by the backlog in Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) testing, as well as the closure of testing sites due to overwhelming testing demand.

The [increased pressure](#) on PCR testing has meant that international students and temporary visa holders are not able to seek the testing they need. Long queues for PCR tests and worsening test result turnaround times are now commonplace.

The poorly executed changes to testing requirements and definitions of close contacts have also created overwhelming demand for RATs. Pharmacies and the retail sector were [not prepared](#) for these policy changes and this surge in demand. As a result, pharmacies are out of stock of these essential tests. When tests become available, [price-gouging](#) both online and offline are also widespread.

This new eligibility criteria for RATs serves to create a false dichotomy between different groups. The virus does not discriminate between Australian citizens, permanent residents, refugees and temporary visa holders. We are [just as vulnerable](#) to the same financial, mental and physical health issues as everyone else. The difference is that we do not have the Medicare or Centrelink concessions (such as the Health Care Card) to protect us. Therefore, the criteria represents a kick in the guts for temporary visa holders.

International students and migrants have already suffered enough from this pandemic. We have borne the brunt of multiple COVID-related [racist attacks](#). We have waited patiently for weeks as the Australian Immunisation Register resolved [major issues](#) with providing proof of vaccination. International students have either [died as a result of COVID-19](#), or the increased prevalence of [domestic violence](#) during the pandemic.

Therefore, we strongly support [the demands](#) by the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) and the Australian Medical Association (AMA) to make RATs accessible and equitable. We call on the National Cabinet, state governments, and the Federal Government to:

- Make RATs free and accessible for everyone in Australia, without any eligibility requirements
- Strengthen access to isolation payments for temporary visa holders who would be vulnerable, or would miss out on work due to isolation and testing requirements.

Neglecting to commit to these demands would harm the international student and migrant community. Not protecting our community means that Australia will fail to protect itself from the COVID-19 pandemic.