

## **Volunteers urgently need RATs to remain safe and effective**

Volunteering Victoria calls on the State Government to urgently provide free rapid antigen tests (RATs) to every volunteer and organisation involved in the delivery of essential services.

The current surge in infections and testing only reinforce the pressing need for concrete actions supporting volunteers and their organisations. While Volunteering Victoria welcomes the allocation of free tests to concession cardholders, this policy forgets the thousands of volunteer-involving and community organisations and their volunteers.

*"Organisations and volunteers are under increased pressure. With the Omicron surging, Victorian volunteers are at increased risk of contracting and/or spreading the virus, threatening thousands of volunteers into isolation."* says Scott Miller, Chief Executive of Volunteering Victoria.

The safety of all involved is paramount to building trust through and following this latest wave and the provision of free rapid tests for volunteers in essential services is urgent.

*"It is abundantly clear that the Victorian government must urgently act to ensure organisations can count on volunteers to meet the increase demand on their services. Organisations simply do not have the means to provide rapid tests to their volunteers, and volunteers cannot be expected to cover such costs. Without prompt Government action, we fear that the delivery of many essential volunteering programs and activities will be severely disrupted."* adds Miller.

During the Delta surge, volunteer organisations reported a 43% increase in demand for services, with 56% reporting that they need more volunteers. Additionally, 72% of organisation's volunteer programs were either only partially operational (60%) or not operational (12%).

*"As we aim to recover from the effects of the pandemic, now is a critical time to focus on ensuring safe and effective volunteering."* concluded Miller.

Beyond the immediate need for free rapid tests, Volunteering Victoria recommends the State Government create a Volunteer COVID-19 recovery fund of \$3 million over the next 12 months as an urgent priority for volunteers to continue fulfilling their vital role in communities throughout Victoria. We are advocating for a flexible funding program that will allow organisations to respond quickly to unpredictable environments and meet the growing need for their services.

### **For media inquiries:**

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