

For  
the  
Future

# COVID-19 Plan





#### Acknowledgment of country.

We acknowledge and respect the Traditional Custodians whose ancestral lands we live and work upon and we pay our respects to their Elders past and present. We acknowledge and respect their deep spiritual connection and the relationship that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to Country. We also pay our respects to the cultural authority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their nations in South Australia, as well as those across Australia.

# Foreword

The people of South Australia have excelled during the course of the pandemic.

We have stayed home when told, we got tested when sick, we have got vaccinated en masse. Businesses have made sacrifices for the common good. People have missed seeing their loved ones. And our frontline essential workers have put their safety on the line to protect ours.

What people did expect in return, was that their State Government would be ready. Using that head start available because of the good work of South Australians. Preparing the systems and training enough staff to be ready.

Unfortunately, over the past few weeks we have seen that, sadly, the Government did not use that golden opportunity to prepare our state.

Over the course of the pandemic, I've provided bipartisan support to the Marshall Liberal Government on restrictions and measures to keep us safe.

The decisions of this Government have meant that people are less safe than we were just weeks ago.

On 26 October 2021, Steven Marshall unveiled his COVID-19 roadmap saying he would open the borders on 23 November.

I made it clear at the time the State should only open up if our systems were ready to cope with the deliberate decision to let COVID-19 into the State.

Premier Steven Marshall assured South Australians that he was ready and then when we started to get cases he declared "we've got this".

In early December, the Chief Public Health Officer, Professor Nicola Spurrier, recommended to close the borders given the emergence of the Omicron variant. The Marshall Government did not follow her recommendation.

Now with spiralling case numbers, long queues at testing clinics, a contact tracing system unable to cope with the sheer weight of numbers and seriously ill patients with the virus ramped in ambulances at our hospitals waiting for a bed,

and with businesses shutting down, Premier Steven Marshall's decisions and lack of preparation have left us in a state of crisis. We need action fast.

In the absence of leadership from the Premier, I am outlining my plan for immediate action to deal with the current wave of cases.

These are not actions that can wait until after the next election; they are urgent actions to be taken now.

1. **Get our schools COVID-ready and give parents certainty**
2. **Increase access to free rapid antigen tests**
3. **Recall Parliament to respond to COVID-19 challenges**
4. **Escalate access to booster doses**
5. **Establish additional testing sites**
6. **Boost health system capacity**
7. **Improve communication and transparency**
8. **Provide immediate real support for COVID-hit industries**

It didn't have to be this way – but now we are in this situation, it is my duty to provide the leadership and direction that is sorely missing in addressing this crisis.



Peter Malinauskas MP  
SA Labor Leader





# 1.

## GET OUR SCHOOLS COVID READY

With just weeks until school returns, the Marshall Government has failed to prepare and protect our teachers and students from COVID-19 in a classroom environment.

The Government has refused to commit to free rapid antigen testing in schools, failed to complete and release the results of its ventilation audits of classrooms, or to install air purifiers in classrooms ahead of the new school year.

In evidence to a parliamentary committee on 10 January, SA Health said the Government will only receive 70,000 doses of the paediatric vaccine for children aged five to 11 before school is set to return at the end of January. This is despite the fact there are 144,000 eligible children in SA. Government booking websites this week showed the earliest available bookings were in early February, after students are due to return to school.

It led to the Premier warning parents “there’s going to be disruption and that’s the first thing to let every single parent know.”

### Urgent actions required

- ✓ Secure a stockpile for our schools to provide free rapid antigen testing for teachers and students.
- ✓ Open dedicated sites for 5-11 year olds to get vaccinated, including mobile vaccination sites at schools.
- ✓ Complete and release the results of the ventilation audits of schools.
- ✓ Conduct ventilation audits of pre-schools, kindergartens and child care settings in the same process that was conducted in schools.
- ✓ Fast-track the installation of air purifiers in classrooms.

COVID-19  
Ag



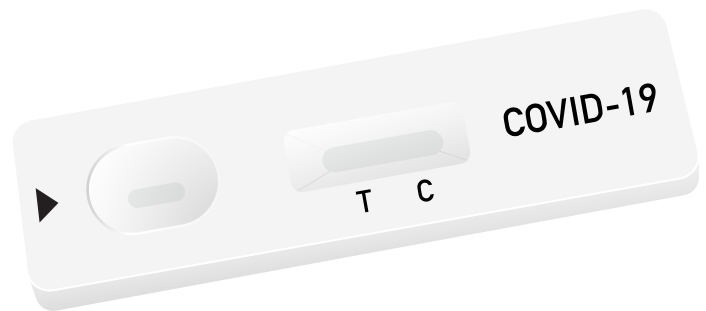
C  
T



S

# 2.

## RAPID ANTIGEN TESTING



The New South Wales Government announced this week that the first 50 million of their rapid antigen test order will be distributed to essential workers and vulnerable communities, from this week, with a further 50 million set for delivery from February into March. On 29 December, Victoria announced it had secured 34 million tests and would be making them freely available within weeks. Meanwhile, there is no clear path for all South Australians to be able to freely access the tests.

Rapid antigen tests have been widely used around the world for many months, but the Marshall Liberal Government has remained in the slow lane in acquiring the tests and recommending their use.

The test involves taking a nasal swab (using a small cotton bud) that is placed into a chemical solution.

A result takes around 15 to 20 minutes.

Rapid antigen tests have been used in some Australian industries as a workplace surveillance tool to screen people who do not have symptoms for COVID-19.

By using rapid antigen testing in this way, workplaces may detect COVID-19 in asymptomatic individuals and prevent exposure in the workplace.

After overturning a ban on rapid antigen tests just before Christmas, Steven Marshall told South Australians there were “millions of rapid antigen test kits here in SA” yet there has been little evidence people are able to get easy access to the stockpile.

On 12 January, Steven Marshall announced rapid antigen tests will be given free to close contacts from a limited number of collection points across the state. He didn’t commit to making the tests more widely available for free.

Currently, limited supplies are commercially available costing upwards of \$15-\$20 per test.

Under current arrangements, some South Australians who must test daily because of their health circumstances or their work environment could face bills of over \$100 per week.

### Urgent actions required

- ✓ Follow the lead of New South Wales and Victoria in securing significant and ongoing supplies of rapid antigen tests.
- ✓ Make tests available for free for essential workers, people on low incomes and from vulnerable communities.

# 3.

## RECALL PARLIAMENT

When the Marshall Liberal Government shut down the House of Assembly at the beginning of December, it did so in the knowledge that it had opened the State to the spread of COVID-19.

The day following that last sitting day, the threat from a new variant, Omicron, became real with the first case reported in New South Wales.

Since then, the number of COVID-19 cases in South Australia has risen rapidly, with tens of thousands of active cases now in the State.

The Government has also made a number of decisions in this period including failing to follow the recommendation of the Chief Public Health Officer to close state borders.

They have also made decisions impacting on industry, business and workers without consultation that could impact on the long-term health, social and economic future of South Australia.

It's important the Parliament has an opportunity to not only review these decisions but also to consider what legislation may now be needed to ensure sufficient resources are directed where they are needed in metropolitan and regional South Australia.

One such example would be new laws to require the Government to publish health advice and reasons for each COVID-19 decision. This is currently the case in Victoria.

The Government could also be required to consult with workers and their representatives when changes are made to directions that impacts specific industries.

There is ample opportunity in January and February, before the writs are issued for the March state election, for Parliament to be recalled.



### Urgent actions required

- ✓ Recall Parliament to establish a law that requires health advice and a “statement of reasons” to be published for each COVID-19 decision made. This is currently the case in Victoria.
- ✓ Establish a law that requires the Government to consult with businesses, workers and their representatives when decisions are made that impact specific industries.
- ✓ Give parliament the opportunity to review the Government’s pandemic responses to ensure they meet the needs of all South Australians, including essential workers.

# 4.

## BOOSTER VACCINES

The evidence is clear that booster doses are essential for increasing the immunity of the population to the Omicron variant, yet relatively few South Australians have accessed their boosters.

This is at a time when we still haven't reached 90% of eligible South Australians receiving their first two doses in many parts of the State.

Transparency over the booster numbers is lacking because the Government does not report the percentage of eligible South Australians with a booster on its daily Covid-19 dashboard.

There is a steady availability of COVID-19 vaccinations, yet the Government has failed to use these to increase booster shot availability.

As the number of COVID-19 has escalated, the Government promised immediate booster doses for South Australians who had received two doses of AstraZeneca. It emerged though they'd only brought the third dose forward by eight days for a limited number of people. This is particularly concerning given emerging evidence of AZ's reduced effectiveness against the Omicron variant.

Those South Australians ready and willing to get their booster dose are finding it incredibly difficult to obtain, with a lack of availability of appointments across mass vaccination clinics.

There are also significant concerns for residents of aged care facilities who are being denied access to in-home booster shots, despite their high vulnerability and waning levels of immunity many months after receiving a second dose.

### Urgent actions required

- ✓ Increase booking availability for booster shots across the mass vaccination hubs.
- ✓ Immediately make available booster doses for South Australians who have only received AstraZeneca to date, improving our resilience against the Omicron variant.
- ✓ Urgent rollout of third doses to both staff and residents of aged care facilities, protecting vulnerable South Australians.
- ✓ Report daily, the percentage of South Australia's population to have received their booster COVID-19 dose.







# 5.

## TESTING CLINICS

Before opening the State's borders, Steven Marshall told South Australians our pathology and testing capacity was “adequate”, yet for many weeks, South Australians have suffered unacceptable waiting times at PCR testing clinics.

To exacerbate that, the Marshall Liberal Government closed testing clinics over Christmas and New Year and on days of extreme heat.

These are not unforeseen challenges. The festive season and hot summer days occur every year and should have been planned for.

No adequate provisions for shade were made for people lining up at walk-in clinics in the blistering summer heat, nor has the Government established additional indoor clinics for people to access critical testing during hot summer days.

This is particularly of concern for older South Australians, or those with limited mobility, who are among the most vulnerable and would benefit from greater access to in-home PCR testing

Even for South Australians able to get tested, there have been significant delays on test results.

The Marshall Liberal Government should have been looking to other jurisdictions around the Australia and world to plan for these challenges.

### Urgent actions required

- ✓ Rapidly stand-up additional 24/7 PCR testing sites to reduce wait times across the state.
- ✓ Provision for additional indoor sites where people are able to wait out of the heat for their tests.
- ✓ Expand walk-in clinics to provide more PCR testing options for those without access to a vehicle or otherwise unable to drive.
- ✓ Boost SA Pathology resourcing targeted at reducing COVID-19 test turnaround times by standing up additional test collection staff, including rehiring some of the staff the Marshall Government made redundant from SA Pathology before the pandemic.
- ✓ Deploy staff to ensure appropriate testing capacity is available in regional areas.



# 6.

## IMPROVE COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPARENCY

The Government is currently spending an estimated \$4 million on advertising campaigns to promote their infrastructure plans, their job plans and the health budget, but just a tiny fraction of that on public information on COVID-19.

South Australians have little ability to access expert health advice regarding the evolving pandemic, or information on how to manage COVID-19 symptoms if they are a confirmed positive case.

While the modelling for the Government's "COVID Ready" road map was publicly released, the updated modelling following Omicron's spread has been kept private.

The Government should immediately release that modelling. They should continue to publish any changes as they become available.

South Australians have experienced rapidly shifting rules and restrictions. During December changes were occurring on a near-daily basis. There is no way of confirming whether the health advice has been followed or ignored in each of these decisions.

The Victorian Government has enshrined in law that they must publish their Chief Health Officer's advice, and a 'statement of reasons' for each COVID-19 decision made.

### Urgent actions required

- ✓ Cancel Government advertising and divert funds to a COVID-19 booster campaign, encouraging South Australians to receive their booster dose.
- ✓ Make public the health advice to any official committee including COVID-Ready Committee. Regularly release updated Adelaide University modelling on the COVID risk in SA.
- ✓ Make the COVID Hotline a 24/7 support service by diverting existing public sector staff to the response effort. Boost the frequency of advice and training available to hotline staff, enabling them to provide accurate and comprehensive advice to South Australians amid the rapidly evolving situation.



# 7.

## BOOST HEALTH SYSTEM CAPACITY

The repeated pleas from our doctors, nurses, and paramedics to urgently boost our health system capacity were ignored by this government, and now patients are paying the price.

Doctors and nurses warned our hospitals weren't ready to manage a sustained major COVID-19 outbreak, and now we are experiencing COVID-19 transmission in our hospitals.

Hundreds of doctors, nurses, paramedics and other health workers have contracted COVID-19 since the Marshall Liberal Government opened the borders last November. This has placed our hospital system under even more pressure.

Our public hospitals remain chronically understaffed, resulting in critical workforce shortages and delays to patient care when staff are required to stop working and isolate.

Our paramedics are under enormous pressure, with ramping already up 576 per cent compared to four years ago and regularly not enough crews to meet demand.

There have been many reports of COVID-19 positive patients being ramped outside the Royal Adelaide Hospital.



Paramedics have reported extreme capacity issues over the past fortnight, with SA Ambulance remaining at “OpStat White” crisis levels for multiple days running.

The Government promised to implement a “COVID-ready” plan for the SA Ambulance Service, but paramedics report it is yet to be enacted.

Hospital capacity is further limited by the Government’s decision to close 188 COVID-ready beds at the Wakefield Hospital and College Grove sites in early 2021.

Residential aged care facilities are struggling to cope with internal COVID-19 transmission among both staff and residents, leaving multiple sites dangerously understaffed and residents at risk.

Likewise, the primary health system is vulnerable and under pressure. Promised clinics to help people with COVID-19 systems have not materialised. Promised dedicated GP clinics are not available. And promised at-home care for people with COVID-19 is not available to all.

## Urgent actions required

- ✔ Urgently enact the promised “COVID-ready” plans for the SA Ambulance Service, enabling paramedics to respond more effectively to callouts amid an outbreak.
- ✔ Immediately open vacant beds and bring online additional staff to ease the strain on our hospital system.
- ✔ Deploy teams to help address issues when dealing with outbreaks in aged care.
- ✔ Urgently expand the roll out promised outreach health care for South Australians managing a positive COVID-19 diagnosis at home.
- ✔ Open promised dedicated GP Respiratory Clinics and Respiratory-Ready GP Clinics for people experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and unable to access their regular doctor.



# 8.

## PROVIDE IMMEDIATE SUPPORT FOR COVID HIT INDUSTRIES

Hospitality, tourism, and retail businesses have suffered a crippling December, which for many is the most profitable time of the year. Now they face the prospect of ongoing poor trade in the New Year, following the new restrictions imposed on Boxing Day.

Many businesses have already closed their doors and stood down staff, their calls for immediate assistance from the Marshall Liberal Government falling on deaf ears.

In August 2021, Labor put forward a comprehensive compensation package for businesses that was ignored by the Marshall Government.

The Marshall Liberal Government must sit down with industry and business leaders to develop meaningful financial packages to allow businesses and the workers and jobs they support to maintain their viability. What they have announced so far has not gone nearly far enough to ensure these businesses can survive beyond the pandemic.

### Urgent actions required

A comprehensive assistance package should comprise:

- ✓ Cash payments to eligible businesses of between \$100 and \$500 per day where density restrictions of greater than 50% capacity remain in place.
- ✓ Calls for the Commonwealth Government to establish a JobSeeker-like program to ensure workers in the industry have an income.
- ✓ Land tax relief to landlords that pass the relief on to business tenants.
- ✓ Land tax deferrals for remaining obligations.
- ✓ A moratorium on retail and commercial tenant evictions.
- ✓ Payroll tax deferrals, with no-interest repayment plans.
- ✓ Accommodation support payments where bed nights have been cancelled.
- ✓ New arts and events cancellation fund with grants of up to \$250,000 to assist with financial losses when forced to cancel/restrict attendance.



South  
Australian  
**Labor**

For  
the  
Future