

## WRONG TIME TO END RAT PROGRAM FOR DISADVANTAGED

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One of Australia's leading social services groups has urged the Federal Government to continue providing free rapid antigen tests to vulnerable groups as Australians face increased covid numbers and hospitalisations.

The scheme, introduced in January this year, provides Pensioner Concession Card, Low Income Health Care Card, and Seniors Card holders with up to 10 free rapid tests over three months.

So far, more than 58 million tests have been handed out under the program.

Earlier this week, Federal Health Minister Mark Butler said the program would not be extended beyond July.

Francis Sullivan, Chair of Catholic Social Services Australia, said closing the scheme sends the wrong message and puts low-income and disadvantaged groups at risk.

"We are in the middle of a deadly fourth Covid wave that is seeing thousands of people contract the virus and hospital admissions on the rise." Mr Sullivan said.

"At a time when we should be encouraging more people to test, now is the wrong time to close this program down.

"Despite the cost of RATs having come down from earlier this year to around \$8, millions of disadvantaged Australians will struggle to cover the costs of regular testing, particularly as we face serious cost of living pressures.

"Keeping in mind that someone may have to take several tests over numerous days, for many low-income earners, the price is still prohibitive," Mr Sullivan said.

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