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SUPPORT NEEDED AS SOME LOCAL BUSINESSES BATTLE TO SURVIVE

The region's peak business organisation, Business Illawarra believes businesses impacted by the Omicron surge need to be provided short term support by the NSW Government as they battle to keep their doors open.

"It's been a really challenging Christmas and New Year period for Illawarra businesses of all sizes across many industries as they battled staff shortages arising from workers becoming infected and isolating, and a drop in consumer confidence," said Executive Director of Business Illawarra, Adam Zarth.

"It was a perfect storm as customers fearing the spread of the Omicron variant stayed away from businesses that would normally be thriving during Summer, and those that did venture out attended venues that were severely understaffed," Mr Zarth said.

"Many businesses are unable to open due to staff shortages, and those that have opened are experiencing cancellations that is again plaguing the hard-hit events sector."

"All this has been severely exacerbated by the unavailability of Rapid Antigen Tests, which should have been better planned for given the publication of a reopening roadmap back in October."

"Business Illawarra is working closely with Government on measures that can provide some swift and short-term support for businesses, at a time when they need it most."

"Our proposed relief measures include:

- Allowing all close contact employees to return to the workplace on the presentation of a negative RAT, reducing the need for mandated periods of isolation;
- An extension of the [SME Summer Stock Guarantee](#) to allow impacted businesses to apply to the guarantee if their business has been closed due to a case on their premises leading to majority staff stand-down for more than 3 days and/or to abide by close contact instructions from NSW Health;
- An extension of the commercial rent relief for commercial tenants who have and likely will have closed or ceased trade between 15 December and 14 January due to current COVID trade impacts; and
- The reinstatement of the [Hardship Review Panel](#) to assess business impacts into 2022."

"Vaccination is still a critical step we can all take for community safety, and booster shots are incredibly important protection against the Omicron variant."

"Business is not seeking a handout, but we are seeking support to keep the doors open for the first three months of 2022," Mr Zarth said.

Media Contact – Adam Zarth 0404 146 829

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About Business Illawarra

Formerly the Illawarra Business Chamber, *Business Illawarra* is the region's peak business organisation; a not-for-profit advocacy group dedicated to the economic development of the Illawarra.