



THE HON JUSTINE ELLIOT MP

Minister for Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

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Annual National Free Flu Vaccination for Over 65s – Launch

The Australian Government today officially launched its annual free flu vaccination program for people over 65 – with record supplies of vaccinations being distributed to prepare for this year's flu season.

Currently, there are some 2.8 million Australians – about 13 per cent of the population – aged 65 and over. This number is expected to triple in 40 years.

Minister for Ageing, Mrs Justine Elliot, the Federal MP for Page, Ms Janelle Saffin and Australia's Ambassador for Ageing, Ms Noeline Brown officially launched this year's free flu vaccination program at Goonellabah Medical Centre in Lismore.

Mrs Elliot urged Australians over 65 to get the free influenza shots to protect themselves from potentially life-threatening winter illness. When a person turns 65, they are eligible for the free vaccine.

It is recommended to have the vaccination close to the flu season – usually April to October. (It generally peaks in August).

Mrs Elliot said: "Most healthy adults will recover from influenza within a few days without any complications."

"However, some people, especially those aged 65 and over and people with certain chronic medical conditions can suffer complications. This can include pneumonia requiring hospitalisation, and even death," Mrs Elliot said.

Typical symptoms of influenza include fever, cough, sore throat, fatigue, muscle aches, headaches, runny noses and watery eyes.

"I would encourage all older Australians to make an appointment with their GP to receive the flu vaccination this year, Mrs Elliot said.

On average between 1997- 2006, 2,758 Australians died each year from influenza and pneumonia.

Influenza, commonly called 'the flu', is an illness caused by the influenza virus. The virus is passed from person to person by a simple sneeze or cough.

The Federal Government will spend more than \$28.8 million on influenza and related programs in 2008-09 with a record 2.712 million doses of influenza vaccine distributed to GPs, at clinics or in nursing homes in 2008.

.In 2008, there were 9,129 cases of laboratory-confirmed influenza diagnosed and reported to the National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System.

This is slightly less than in 2007, where there were 10,403 laboratory-confirmed cases.

In 2007, there were 2,623 deaths attributed to influenza and pneumonia. They were also the 13th leading cause of death in Australia for that year.¹

Data on vaccines supplied Australia-wide - 2008

State/Territory	Vaccines supplied – 2008	Vaccines supplied – 2007
New South Wales	895,130	881,000
Victoria	704,490	663,000
Queensland	477,125	435,000
Western Australia	272,475	265,000
South Australia	225,000	225,000
Tasmania	79,318	78,000
Australian Capital Territory	32,315	31,000
Northern Territory	26,154	21,000
AUSTRALIA	2,712,007	2,599,000

Funding for Influenza program – 2008-2009

State	Influenza – 65 years and over	Influenza other	
	Total funding per program	Total funding per program	Total
ACT	\$337,214	\$11,324	\$348,538
NSW	\$9,326,553	\$375,428	\$9,701,981
Victoria	\$6,959,745	\$83,862	\$7,043,607
Queensland	\$5,150,793	\$337,266	\$5,488,059
South Australia	\$2,376,347	\$67,041	\$2,443,388
Western Australia	\$2,523,379	\$174,173	\$2,697,552
Tasmania	\$725,934	\$42,114	\$768,048
Northern Territory	\$117,633	\$146,454	\$264,087
TOTAL	\$27,517,598	\$1,237,662	\$28,755,260

For more information, contact Mrs Elliot's office on (02) 6277 7280

ⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009), *Causes of Death 2007*