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PRIME MINISTER**

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JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

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Ground-breaking flu vaccines to protect millions of Aussies

The Turnbull Government will provide two new ground-breaking flu vaccines to over three million Australians aged 65 years and over - free of charge.

This is a direct response to last year's horrific flu season, which had a devastating impact around the world, and aimed squarely at saving lives.

More than 90 per cent of the 1,100 flu related deaths in 2017 were by people aged over 65 years of age.

The Turnbull Government and the Chief Medical Officer, Professor Brendan Murphy, have worked behind the scenes for many months to bring two new flu vaccines to Australia for the first time.

The vaccines have been fast-tracked to ensure lives are saved and that older Australians receive greater protection.

These new vaccines – Flud[®] and Fluzone High Dose[®] – were registered in Australia to specifically provide increased protection for people aged 65 years and older.

From April 2018, both vaccines will be available through the National Immunisation Program following a recommendation from the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee.

These new trivalent (three strain) vaccines work in over 65s by generating a strong immune response and are more effective for this age group in protecting against influenza.

These vaccines have been specifically made for the elderly, as their immune systems respond less effectively to vaccines.

Professor Murphy is continuing to investigate ways to improve protection from seasonal influenza, particularly for the elderly.

This includes mandating a requirement for residential aged care providers to provide a seasonal influenza vaccination program to all staff.

Additionally the Aged Care Quality Agency is continuing a review of the infection control practices of aged care services across the country.

The outcomes will inform new guidelines around the areas of the greatest risk to the safety, health and wellbeing of care recipients.

We must continue to do all we can to protect those Australians who are most at risk.

Under the National Immunisation Program, those eligible for a free flu shot include people aged 65 years and over, pregnant women, most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and those who suffer from chronic conditions.

Last year more than 4.5 million doses of the influenza vaccine were provided at no cost to Australians who were most at risk from the flu.

Vaccination saves lives and they are fundamental to our health system.

It can save the life of the person receiving the vaccine, but importantly it also protects those who are unable to vaccinate due to health reasons.

Annual vaccination is the most important measure for preventing influenza and its complications and we encourage all Australians to get vaccinated.

We encourage all Australians aged over six months old to get a flu vaccination this year before the peak season starts in June.

Today we can also announce the following the four strains which will be contained within this year's Southern Hemisphere vaccines:

- A(H1N1): an A/Michigan/45/2015(H1N1) pdm09 like virus
- A(H3N2): an A/Singapore/INFIMH-16-0019/2016(H3N2) like virus
- B: a B/Phuket/3073/2013 like virus
- B: a B/Brisbane/60/2008 like virus

The composition of the Australian vaccine is decided by the Australian Influenza Vaccine Committee in consultation with the World Health Organization.

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