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## Advisory Committee on the Health Emergency Response to Coronavirus (COVID-19) for People with Disability Meeting 8 November 2022 – Summary of Outcomes

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Committee members with lived experience of disability, carers and advocates raised the following issues:

- Schools are not being managed as high-risk sites for vulnerable children despite high numbers of COVID-19 cases in these settings. There was concern that sufficient infection prevention and control measures are not in place.
- Disability support workers are not always following COVID safe practices in the absence of public health requirements. People with disability are having difficult conversations with support workers about measures like mask wearing.
- Disability support workers need targeted and consistent information on what they can do to keep people with disability safe from COVID-19. People with disability also need effective messaging on how to protect themselves.

Nous Group presented on its development of an independent report on the lessons the Committee has learned throughout the pandemic. Nous conducted interviews and sought written submissions from the Committee, people with lived experience of disability, carers and disability support workers to develop the report. Nous Group also detailed how they addressed the Committee's feedback on an earlier draft of the report. Members requested further amendment to the report to reflect:

- the importance and value of telehealth for people with disability, and
- the role of COVID-19 pandemic visas in sustaining the disability workforce.

The department provided an update on COVID-19 vaccination, which covered:

- advice from the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) on the number of doses of COVID-19 vaccine that people should receive. The Department has [published a poster](#) which outlines ATAGI's recommendations
- recommendations on the use of the Moderna bivalent COVID-19 booster, which generates a modestly higher level of antibody response against SARS-CoV-2 Omicron subvariants. It is not yet known whether this translates to greater clinical protection than that provided by the original Moderna and Pfizer vaccines
- the growing level of hybrid immunity in the community, from a combination of COVID-19 cases and being up to date with booster doses, and
- current arrangements for in-reach COVID-19 vaccination in disability settings.

Members of the Committee highlighted the importance of measures that support people with disability to access vaccination in their homes:

- Barriers prevent many people with disability from accessing vaccination against COVID-19 and other diseases through community pathways. For example, some people would be put at significant risk of COVID-19 transmission if they were to access vaccination services outside of their home.
- People with intellectual disability experience higher rates of hospitalisation for vaccine preventable conditions.

The department's Health Economics and Research Division presented on options for reporting COVID-19 mortality data for people with disability. The Committee agree that it is important to publish mortality data, especially where risk factors such as disability type, age and accommodation settings can be identified. The Committee was asked to provide further feedback on reporting options out of session.

The department also gave an update on COVID-19 communications which covered:

- current communication campaigns that encourage people to stay up to date with vaccinations, wear masks and follow other COVID safe behaviours, and
- plans to include more people with lived experience of disability in the Committee's communications working group.

## NEXT STEPS

The department will:

- raise the Committee's concerns about the management of COVID-19 risks in schools with the Australian Government Department of Education and state and territory governments. Responses will be sought before the Committee's next meeting
- send the Committee advice that was recently shared with the disability support sector on providing safe services during the COVID-19 pandemic, and
- circulate a revised draft of the report on the lessons learned by the Committee throughout the pandemic for final written comment out of session. Once feedback has been addressed, a final report will be provided to the Committee for endorsement before the report is presented to the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee and Commonwealth Ministers, with a view to publication.

Advocacy for Inclusion has been invited to the Committee's next meeting to present on its [white paper on COVID-19 and people with disability](#).

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled for 13 December 2022.