
**Advisory Committee on the Health Emergency Response
to COVID-19 for People with Disability
Meeting 6 June 2023 – Summary of Outcomes**

Committee members with lived experience of disability and advocates voiced concerns about:

- COVID-19 complacency among disability support workers and
- the risks this may pose to people with disability.

The Committee's communications working group has also raised this issue of growing complacency about the risks of COVID-19 in the broader community. To address this, the Department of Health and Aged Care (the department) is encouraging the community, through social media and advertising, to 'protect yourself to protect others' and get a COVID-19 booster vaccination.

The Commonwealth's Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Prof Michael Kidd AM, provided an epidemiological update on COVID-19 and influenza. COVID-19 case numbers and hospitalisations have risen from a low point in mid-February but may have recently peaked. Case numbers for influenza and respiratory syncytial virus have also increased recently. Prof Kidd also noted that influenza and COVID-19 booster rates in aged care are lower than desirable.

Dr Nick Simpson, a medical advisor in the department's Technology Assessment and Access Division, gave an update on COVID-19 oral treatments. This covered:

- changes to Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme eligibility criteria for COVID-19 oral treatments, and
- manufacturer and off-label advice on the use of COVID-19 oral treatments for people with swallowing difficulties. Clinical assessment should inform the use of COVID-19 oral treatments by people with swallowing difficulties.

The department's Health Economics and Research Division presented on COVID-19 and influenza data for people with disability. The [Department's website](#) now has updated public reporting of COVID-19 deaths among people on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and Disability Support Pension (DSP). There has been a noticeable uptick in COVID-19 booster rates among people on the NDIS and DSP since late February 2023.

Members reiterated concerns about the low COVID-19 vaccination rates among some people with disability, and the Committee discussed:

- whether current measures to support access to COVID-19 vaccination are sufficient
- how to reach families with messaging on the importance of COVID-19 vaccination for people with disability
- how COVID-19 and vaccine fatigue may be impacting people's willingness to be vaccinated, and
- the role of disability providers in supporting vaccination access.

The department noted that Nous Group's report on the lessons learned by the Committee during the COVID-19 pandemic is now available on the Department's website. The report is also available in Easy Read. These are on the [Committee's webpage](#).

Disability Discrimination Commissioner Dr Ben Gauntlett informed members that this would be his last Committee meeting, as he is leaving this role. He thanked the Committee for its work.

NEXT STEPS

The department will:

- report any changes PBAC makes to eligibility criteria for COVID-19 oral treatments to the Committee
- develop a resource for the Committee outlining current measures to support access to vaccination
- ask the Committee's communications working group to consider how to better reach families of people with disability with messaging on COVID-19 vaccination, and
- ask the NDIS Commission to present on provider responsibilities to support vaccination access at the Committee's next meeting.

The Committee’s next meeting will be on 4 July 2023.