
Advisory Committee on the Health Emergency Response to COVID-19 for People with Disability

Meeting 23 August 2023 – Summary of Outcomes

The Department of Health and Aged Care (the department) provided an update on action items from previous meetings. This included actions on the public communication of COVID-19 mortality data for people with disability agreed to at the Committee's [meeting on 21 July 2023](#).

People with Disability Australia (PWDA) spoke about a paper it will release on protecting people with disability as the pandemic continues. The paper will include recommendations on ventilation, testing and the use of masks and telehealth services. PWDA will send a copy of the paper to the department.

The department's Office of Health Protection and Response provided a COVID-19 and influenza epidemiological update:

- COVID-19 case notifications, hospitalisations and deaths have decreased recently, and intensive care unit admissions are stable. The latest weekly COVID-19 mortality count was requested.
- Two new COVID-19 variants, Eris and Pirola, are being monitored.
- Influenza cases are gradually declining. There are more influenza-associated deaths among older people but more cases among children and young people.

A medical advisor in the department's Technology Assessment and Access Division, presented on how people with multiple sclerosis (MS) may meet eligibility criteria for COVID-19 oral antivirals. A person with MS and COVID-19 may be eligible for treatments due to:

- their age
- immunocompromise status and/or
- because MS is a demyelinating disease contributing to the person's risk status.

The Committee discussed how data informs the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee's consideration of eligibility criteria for COVID-19 oral treatments.

The department provided an update on the establishment of an Australian Centre for Disease Control (CDC), which will provide national focus and leadership on disease management. Members commended the focus on people with disability in the CDC's proposed scope and functions. The Committee emphasised the importance that the CDC's activities are informed by:

- the perspective and lived experience of people with disability
- social and human rights models of disability
- people with disability being visible in the data, and
- learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Committee asked for information on the proportion of people working in the department's CDC establishment branch that are people with disability.

Members discussed whether the Committee should continue beyond the end of August 2023 (its administrative end date) or it should be incorporated into the Disability and Health Sector Consultation Committee. It was agreed the Committee should continue to meet, at a reduced frequency, until the new CDC establishes a disability consultation mechanism.

NEXT STEPS

The department will:

- provide the Committee the latest weekly COVID-19 mortality count
- report back to the Committee on demographics of personnel in the CDC establishment branch and whether there are targets for the employment of people with disability
- include an item on developments in COVID-19 preventatives and treatments on the agenda for the Committee's next meeting
- provide a proposed schedule of meetings into early 2024, at a reduced frequency of around 6-8 weeks.