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

Meeting 8 December 2023 – Summary of Outcomes

The Department of Health and Aged Care (the department) noted changes to the Committee's membership, including the retirement of the Committee's previous chair, Simon Cotterell.

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

- There is confusion in the disability sector about when people should get the new monovalent vaccines and boosters in 2024. Members asked the department to provide short fact-sheets summarising any new recommendations on COVID-19 vaccination made by the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI), like its [recommendations from 20 November 2023](#).
- Members called for more detailed public information on COVID-19 mortality risks for people with disability in Australia.
 - People with disability in Australia have a higher risk of death from COVID-19 than the general population, and the department is publicly communicating this.
 - The department is working with interested members on an article for publication in a refereed journal on COVID-19 mortality for people with disability.

The department's Office of Health Protection and Response provided a COVID-19 epidemiological update. Australia appears to have passed a sixth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, with case numbers decreasing after a peak in early November. Members requested further data on COVID-19 associated deaths among people with disability. Data on COVID-19 associated deaths among people on the National Disability Insurance Scheme and Disability Support Pension is [published on the department's website](#).

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) presented on the Commonwealth Government COVID-19 Response Inquiry. An independent panel has been appointed to conduct the inquiry, which will be supported by a taskforce in PM&C. Members have been invited to make submissions to the Inquiry.

The department's Centre of Disease Control (CDC) Establishment Branch presented on the proposed data strategy for the Australian CDC. The Branch is considering how the CDC will both receive data and share it with other governmental and non-governmental groups. The Committee discussed:

- how members could share expertise on disability data to inform the data strategy, and
- the importance of an ongoing, disability-specific advisory group advising the CDC once it is established.

The department's Public Information Branch presented outcomes from a research project investigating how www.health.gov.au met the information needs of people with disability throughout the pandemic. The views of Committee members on next steps following this research will be sought out of session.

The Committee also heard that an external supplier will be engaged to support a rapid review of the 2023 COVID-19 booster rollout for at risk groups. More information about the review and how the Committee can engage with it will be shared out of session.

NEXT STEPS

The department will:

- develop a short factsheet summarising ATAGI's latest recommendations on COVID-19 vaccination
- circulate a summary of recent communications on the COVID-19 mortality risk for people with disability
- provide an update on COVID-19 mortality data for people with disability at the next meeting, and
- share the report arising from research into the effectiveness of www.health.gov.au in meeting the information needs of people with disability during the pandemic, once it is finalised.

The Committee's next meeting is scheduled for 13 February 2024.