
Advisory Committee on the Health Emergency Response to COVID-19 for People with Disability Meeting 13 February 2024 – Summary of Outcomes

Committee members with lived experience of disability and carers:

- highlighted confusion in the community about current COVID-19 vaccination recommendations
- called for simple and accessible communications to explain any forthcoming 2024 COVID-19 vaccination recommendations, and
- asked why the Novavax COVID-19 vaccine is currently unavailable in Australia.

The Department of Health and Aged Care (department):

- outlined plans to clearly and accessibly communicate any 2024 COVID-19 vaccination recommendations, and
- explained that Novavax is currently seeking approval of a new COVID-19 vaccine.

The department's Health Protection and Policy Surveillance Division provided an epidemiological update. Australia appears to be coming out of a sixth Omicron wave, with case numbers decreasing after a peak in mid-December. The sixth Omicron wave has been less severe and resulted in less deaths than previous waves.

The department's Health Economics and Research Division presented data on COVID-19 mortality for people with disability. This included analysis of all-cause mortality and vaccination status for people with disability. Members recommended efforts to:

- improve COVID-19 vaccination rates among people on the Disability Support Pension, and
- communicate present risks associated with COVID-19 to assist people in making decisions.

Dr Anthony Moore, a senior medical advisor in the department's Health Protection and Policy Surveillance Division, provided an update on COVID-19 treatments and preventatives. The Committee discussed a recent [Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee \(PBAC\) recommendation](#) to limit eligibility for Paxlovid for people aged 50-69 to those with two or more risk factors. Members asked:

- for more information on the reasoning behind PBAC's recommendation
- to be advised of opportunities to inform any future PBAC considerations on eligibility criteria for COVID-19 oral treatments, and
- whether there is updated advice on crushing Paxlovid for people with swallowing difficulties.

The department's Centre of Disease Control (CDC) Establishment Taskforce presented on proposed governance structures for the Australian CDC. The Taskforce is also considering how the Australian CDC can support health equity and engage with priority populations, including people with disability. Members:

- reiterated the need for a disability-specific advisory body that can inform the strategic agenda of the Australian CDC, and
- recommended that such an advisory group feature people with lived experience, research, clinical expertise, and knowledge of the health system.

NEXT STEPS

The department will:

- circulate further information on PBAC's reasons for recommending a change to eligibility criteria for Paxlovid for people aged 50-69 when it becomes available
- identify opportunities for the Committee to support PBAC's future consideration of COVID-19 treatments
- check and circulate advice on the use of Paxlovid by people with swallowing difficulties, and
- provide an update on when the department can share a report arising from research on how www.health.gov.au met the communications needs of people with disability during the pandemic.

The Committee's next meeting is scheduled for 16 April 2024.