
**Advisory Committee on the Health Emergency Response
to COVID-19 for People with Disability
Meeting 16 April 2024 – Summary of Outcomes**

Professor Katie Flanagan from the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) presented on ATAGI's [February 2024 COVID-19 vaccination recommendations](#). Professor Flanagan noted that ATAGI's recommendations are:

- informed by clinical evidence, considering levels of COVID-19 and hybrid immunity in the population, and
- consistent with the World Health Organisation's recommendations.

Professor Flanagan also highlighted the:

- importance of influenza vaccination for people with disability as we approach flu season, and
- availability of a vaccine for respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) on the private market for people aged 60 years and over.

The Department of Health and Aged Care (the department) Health Protection and Policy Surveillance Division provided an epidemiological update. Australia is experiencing decreasing COVID-19 case numbers, hospitalisations and intensive care unit admissions. This follows a peak in January 2024. COVID-19 case numbers are similar those experienced a year ago. However, influenza and RSV case numbers are higher than they were a year ago.

The department's Health Economics and Research Division gave an update on the development of a journal article on COVID-19 and other-cause mortality in people with disability. It is expected that the article will be ready for submission to a peer reviewed publication around the middle of this year. The department will seek the Minister's approval to submit the article for publication.

The department's Office of Health Technology Assessment Branch presented on COVID-19 oral treatments and opportunities to engage with the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC). The Committee received an overview of the outcomes of PBAC's November 2023 relating to COVID-19 oral treatments (Lagevrio and Paxlovid):

- Paxlovid is still considered more effective than Lagevrio. Lagevrio is now only available as a Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme medicine if Paxlovid is contraindicated.
- People aged 50-69 now require at least two risk factors to be eligible for Paxlovid. This criterion was reintroduced giving consideration to cost-effectiveness.
- Public submissions are welcomed in advance of PBAC meetings. More information about consumer engagement is provided on [PBAC's website](#). The department is undertaking work to enhance consumer engagement with PBAC and other health technology assessment advisory committees.

The department's COVID-19 Vaccine Program Division briefly updated the Committee on communication flyers produced to promote COVID-19 booster vaccinations. Draft flyers for consumers and providers were circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting, and feedback from the Committee was requested. The flyers and an Easy Read on the 2024 COVID-19 vaccine recommendations will be published on the department's website once finalised.

The Committee was informed that its term would be extended to enable it to meet until the end of 2024. This will enable the Committee to continue to inform the Australian Centre of Disease Control Establishment Taskforce Division's work.

NEXT STEPS

The department will:

- seek members' feedback on the COVID-19 booster flyers out-of-session, and
- send members more information about the co-design of an enhanced consumer engagement process for health technology assessment.

The Committee's next meeting will be scheduled in July 2024.