



Strengthening Primary Care – COVID-19 primary health response

The Australian Government is continuing to extend a series of primary health care measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic through to 31 December 2021. Since March 2020, the Australian Government has committed \$2.3 billion to support the primary care sector response to the pandemic.

These investments help to support the most vulnerable to access care safely. It includes programs to protect senior and vulnerable Australians, those living in remote communities, and to ensure continued access to General Practitioner-led Respiratory Clinics (GPRCs). It will also maintain dedicated resources for the national coordination and management of COVID-19 operations through the Department of Health's National Incident Centre (NIC).

As part of the 2021–22 Budget, the Australian Government is continuing to invest:

- \$87.5 million for the extended operation of up to 150 GPRCs, bringing total investment to \$446.9 million since March 2020. It will maintain valuable infrastructure and workforce assets to allow GPRCs to play a critical role in the national COVID-19 vaccine rollout
- \$10.7 million for Point of Care Testing which will continue to the end of 2021 to limit the impact of COVID-19 in remote communities. Continuing these measures complements the vaccine rollout and minimises the risk to remote communities
- \$557.1 million to extend the temporary Medicare Benefits Scheme pathology testing items for COVID-19 to 31 December 2021, bringing the total investment to \$1.7 billion since March 2020
- extending Continued Dispensing arrangements and Home Medicines Service, and
- continuing to resource and support the National Incident Centre in monitoring and responding to the pandemic.

Why is this important?

The national network of GPRCs, which cover 99.6% of the population, have already conducted more than one million assessments and one million tests for COVID-19. The extension of GPRCs will keep the pressure off hospitals and GP clinics to continue seeing patients with mild to moderate respiratory ailments. The GPRCs are also playing an increasingly important role in the COVID-19 vaccine rollout.

Access to MBS-supported COVID-19 testing continues to play an important role in our country's response to the pandemic. Timely testing, at no cost to the person, has been central in our ability to detect and respond appropriately to outbreaks of the coronavirus in our community.

Continued dispensing measures have been in place since the 2019–20 Black Summer Bushfires, securing access to life-saving medication, including for those patients who require medicines for asthma, lung disease, diabetes, heart disease and mental illness.

From 13 January 2020 to 31 March 2021, some 295,000 people received at least one supply of medicine under the Continued Dispensing Measures, from 3,600 community pharmacies.

The Home Medicines Service has enabled more than 2.4 million deliveries of medication to patients' homes, by more than 4,700 pharmacies.

Who will benefit?

This extended response will continue to protect all Australians, particularly vulnerable groups such as the elderly, people with chronic conditions and Indigenous communities from COVID-19.

How much will this cost?

The Australian Government is investing a further \$655.3 million over 2 years, from 2021–22.