
Targeted Discussion on COVID-19 Vaccine Communications for Disability Support Workers and People with Disability – 6 May 2021

Key Outcomes

The Department of Health (the department) held a targeted discussion on COVID-19 vaccine communications for disability support workers and people with disability. The discussion was chaired by Simon Cotterell, First Assistant Secretary, Primary Care Division. Participants included:

- people with intellectual disability, living in group homes
- disability support workers
- disability organisations
- disability service providers and the peak industry body for disability services
- members of the Department's disability, aged care and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) COVID-19 advisory groups
- Commonwealth representatives from the Department, the Department of Social Services, the National Disability Insurance Agency, the National Disability Insurance Scheme Quality and Safeguards Commission (NDIS Commission), and
- state and territory government representatives.

Two people with intellectual disability, living in group homes, shared their thoughts about the COVID-19 vaccine and vaccine rollout communications. Their key messages were:

- they understand that the COVID-19 vaccine prevents people from catching COVID-19, which can be dangerous
- they have concerns about the safety of the COVID-19 vaccines, whether it will interfere with their regular medications, and side effects they may experience
- they rely on support workers, health professionals, the government, their families and the media for information on the vaccine
- they desire information on when and where they will receive the vaccine.

Two disability support workers shared their experiences and perspectives of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout. Their key messages were:

- they get information about the vaccine from many places including their employers, government websites, health professionals, peak bodies, unions and the media
- many disability support workers are concerned about the safety of the COVID-19 vaccine, particularly the AstraZeneca vaccine
- from their interactions with colleagues, it appeared that people from CALD backgrounds and older disability support workers were more reluctant about getting the vaccine
- people with disability and their families are influenced by the perspectives support workers have on the COVID-19 vaccine. Guidance for workers on how they should engage in a dialogue about the vaccine with clients and their families would be helpful
- disability support workers want clearer information about their eligibility for the vaccine, where they should access it, and the risks associated with receiving it
- it would be helpful to have more information about the potential side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine, for example, needing time off work.

Professor Anne Kavanagh from the Centre of Research Excellence in Disability and Health presented results from a recent survey of 368 disability support workers' views on receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. Results showed that:

- 50% of participants will get the vaccine as soon as they can
- 9% will wait a while
- 11% will only get the vaccine if required
- 13% hadn't decided yet and
- 17% will not get the vaccine.

Findings from the survey are available at: <https://credh.org.au/covid-19/dsw-vaccine/>

Other issues raised throughout the discussion included:

- peak bodies would like greater involvement in the front-end development of communication strategies and products for the sector
- the importance of market testing communication messages and products with people with disability and disability support workers
- the need to target vaccine hesitancy among CALD and older disability support workers;
- the potential role of vaccine champions
- the role of states and territories and initiatives to support the COVID-19 vaccine rollout at the local level.

NEXT STEPS

- The department will:
 - work with the National Disability Services to improve communications for disability support workers
 - work with the NDIS Commission to develop guidance for disability support workers on how they should converse with people with disability and their families about the vaccine
 - follow up with unions for workers in the disability sector regarding ways to promote the COVID-19 vaccine among disability support workers.