

---

**Advisory Committee on the Health Emergency Response to Coronavirus  
(COVID-19) for People with Disability**  
**Extraordinary Meeting 9 November 2021 – Summary of Outcomes**

---

The Department of Health (the Department) facilitated an extraordinary meeting of the COVID-19 Disability Advisory Committee to discuss lessons learnt throughout the pandemic.

People with lived experience of disability and carers of people with disability shared their experiences and key takeaways. These included:

- mental health impacts from losing independence and accessing normal activities
- continued serious and daily challenges the pandemic presents for people with disability
- ongoing anxiety among people with disability about their vulnerability in the response's transition to 'living with COVID-19'
- feeling that people with disability were not initially considered a priority population at the pandemic's outset
- the importance of accessible and timely communications, and
- people with disability need to be heard. Their voice should shape pandemic preparedness and response policies.

Members of the Committee outlined their key learnings and insights, including:

- the value of the Committee as a body, and its approach in putting the voices of people with lived experience at the centre
- challenges caused by dispersed responsibility for the COVID-19 response for people with disability. Including a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities of:
  - different departments and agencies
  - divisions within departments, and
  - levels of government
- the need for government to frequently consult with people with disability to prepare and respond to health emergencies
- needing more individualised and targeted approaches, improving vaccine uptake among people with disability
- the importance of sharing linked data to identify priority cohorts and areas. Including maintaining transparency to support adaptation and accountability
- the importance of multiple channels of accessible and tailored communications. Including inclusive mainstream communications
- the importance of leadership communications acknowledging people with disability, and
- systemic disadvantages encountered by people with disability, and the amplifying effect the pandemic has had on that disadvantage. Policy needs to reflect the reality of this challenge.

States and territories provided input on practical learnings. These included the:

- value of data sharing arrangements and the need for proactive data to respond to future health outbreaks
- instrumental work of Disability Liaison Officers in helping people with disability access testing, vaccination and other health care services
- importance of appropriate alternative and accessible accommodation arrangements in the context of outbreak management
- role and value of trusted sources in effective communication. Disability health ambassadors were identified as particularly valuable champions of vaccination

- success of drive-through vaccination sites, and
- learnings from the aged care sector response.

All participants emphasised the importance of people with disability being heard throughout the pandemic and their voice being at the forefront of the policies and operations responding to it.

## **NEXT STEPS**

The Department will:

- produce a comprehensive draft document on lessons learnt. This will include the learnings from Committee members, states and territories, and Commonwealth agencies.
- facilitate a further session of non-government members of the Committee early in 2022 to further develop their recommendations
- finalise the 'lessons learnt document' in consultation with all.

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 16 November 2021.