
Advisory Committee on the Health Emergency Response to Coronavirus (COVID-19) for People with Disability Meeting 15 March 2022 – Summary of Outcomes

Committee members with lived experience of disability and carers raised the following issues:

- awareness among people with disability about what they should do after testing positive for COVID-19
- the need for clearer information on oral COVID-19 treatments and their availability
- desire for information on further booster vaccinations, and
- concerns about postage of rapid antigen tests (RATs) in Western Australia in hot weather, above the recommended temperature range.

The Committee raised concerns about the rapid rise in COVID-19 cases and deaths among National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants since December. The NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission noted that registered providers must notify the Commissioner of COVID related events impacting their service delivery, including positive cases, as soon as practicable. A time lag in reporting of cases by some providers may be affecting that data. The Committee was asked to consider what further action could be taken to address rising case numbers and deaths.

The Australian Government Department of Health (the Department) presented on winter preparedness planning, covering:

- the coordination of a national approach to protecting high-risk individuals in the context of COVID-19, influenza and other respiratory infections
- expectation that there will be a further wave of Omicron cases and low-moderate influenza
- a focus on supporting people at home and ensuring essential supply of goods and services
- prioritisation for further booster vaccinations, and
- testing and treatment pathways. This included possible use of multiplex PCR tests that can detect influenza, COVID-19 and other diseases.

The Committee sought clarification on:

- whether in-reach multiplex testing PCR testing would be made available, and
- whether people with disability should hold RATs in reserve, in the face of possible test improvements. It is not known when current RATs will be superseded.

The Department's Living with COVID Taskforce also reported on:

- work to update community care pathways
- COVID-19 clinical assessment and triage through the National Coronavirus Helpline
- home visits measure to support people when their GP lacks capacity, and
- the work of Primary Health Networks to assist access to vaccination and community care, including in recently flooded areas.

State and territory representatives provided the Committee with updates regarding their actions to improve the rates of COVID-19 vaccination in regional communities. These actions included:

- vaccination in-reach programs
- pop-up and mobile vaccination clinics
- the use of vaccine ambassadors
- support for transport to vaccination appointments, and
- identification of and targeted communication with unvaccinated people with disability.

NEXT STEPS

The Department will send the Committee:

- written guidance on COVID-19 oral treatments and their availability
- a paper on the high-level outcomes of the Australian Government's Disability In-reach Assurance Project, and
- the updated scope for the Committee's lessons learned project.

The next meeting of the Advisory Committee is scheduled for 29 March 2022.