



## Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic – Health response extension

The Australian Government is ensuring our health system continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic with an investment of more than \$4.2 billion over four years.

This includes continuing the COVID-19 vaccine program that is helping protect millions of Australians from the worst impacts of the virus and supports re-opening in line with the *National Plan to Transition Australia's National COVID-19 Response*.

The emergence of the Omicron variant in late-2021 required a rapid response and the Government recognises that future variants of concern are an ongoing risk.

The Australian Government is providing additional support to the states and territories through the National Partnership on COVID-19, to ensure the health and aged care systems are able to respond to the challenges of COVID-19 as we now live with the virus.

Through our Winter Preparedness Plan, we have also ensured we are prepared and well placed to deal with the anticipated 2022 influenza season.

Effective response to the ongoing pandemic requires continuing the rollout of booster doses, and providing primary vaccination courses and booster doses to new cohorts, such as children, into the latter half of 2022.

Among the measures are:

- \$1.09 billion to secure essential supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE), including facemasks, face shields, gloves, goggles and gowns for the National Medical Stockpile (NMS), which can be distributed to support the health response to COVID-19, with a particular focus on forward deployment to residential aged care facilities
- \$546 million in continued funding for Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) items for COVID-19 pathology testing
- \$56.9 million to maintain support for the Department of Health's National Incident Centre, which has been at the centre of the response to the pandemic
- Continued investment in COVID-19 treatments including supporting expert advisory groups and access to treatments

- \$10 million for communications to share important vaccination and treatment of COVID-19 information, and
- \$11.3 million in continuing support for digital mental health services in response to the ongoing pandemic pressure, including Lifeline's 13HELP Line.

### Primary Care

- \$13.6 million for the continued provision of essential items, including PPE for GPs and pharmacists to carry out their work, including providing vaccinations.
  - Included in the above is \$1.5 million to purchase an additional 50,000 pulse oximeters to support GPs who are managing COVID-positive patients in the community.
- \$23.4 million to extend the National Triage, Assessment and Referral Service provided through Healthdirect.
- \$248.1 million to ensure GP-led respiratory clinics continue to support the testing and treatment of COVID positive patients throughout winter.
- \$562,000 to support GPs to continue to provide face to face care to COVID-19 patients in the community, where additional personal protective equipment (PPE) may be required.
- \$6 million to extend the support for Primary Health Networks (PHNs) to coordinate the care for COVID-19 patients in the community.
- \$7.9 million for Primary Health Networks (PHNs) to deploy medical deputising services, nurse practitioners and practice nurses to conduct home visits to COVID-19 positive patients in RACFs.
- \$43.3 million in support for the Remote and Indigenous Response to COVID-19 and the transition to living with COVID, which includes:
  - the Remote Community Preparedness and Retrieval measure supporting the Royal Flying Doctor Service's response to outbreaks and vaccination delivery
  - critical support for access to COVID-19 services including testing and vaccination supported by Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services
  - the Remote Point of Care Testing Program which operates in 150 rural and remote communities
  - targeted communications about COVID-19, vaccinations and boosters, and
  - support to rural and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to shift focus beyond COVID-19 only, to also address broader infectious disease health risks.

### National Partnership Agreement on COVID-19

The Australian Government is continuing the standing National Partnership on COVID-19 Response with the States and Territories until 30 September 2022, with \$1 billion to support the health system's capacity to respond to the ongoing COVID-19 challenges. This includes:

- \$597.2 million for activities to minimise the spread of COVID-19, including outbreak management response
- \$311.8 million for state and territory hospital services to support the diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19
- \$54.2 million to support hospital system and workforce surge capacity through the Private Hospital Viability Guarantee
- \$19.3 million to support infection prevention and control training for COVID-19 preparedness in residential aged care facilities through the Aged Care Response Payment, and
- \$38 million to support states and territories to deliver COVID-19 vaccines.

The Australian Government's COVID-19 Rapid Test Concessional Access (CRTCA) Program is being extended to provide support for concession card holders to access up to 20 rapid antigen tests (RATs) from participating community pharmacies. This program is jointly funded 50:50 with the states and territories.

These new investments bring the Government's total commitment to the COVID-19 Health Response to more than \$45 billion since the outbreak of the pandemic.

### **Why is this important?**

The Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the efforts of all Australians in battling the virus have helped save the lives of tens of thousands of Australians from COVID-19, when compared to the number of infections and fatalities in similar nations around the world.

This investment will continue to protect Australians, and underpins the COVID-19 response and Influenza Winter Response Plan.

Each of these measures contributes to the safety, surveillance, diagnosis and treatment of Australians during the pandemic. They also help deliver a strong and safe health care system that is able to cope with additional demand and pressure, to effectively respond to the challenges of living with COVID-19.

Securing significant supplies of PPE for the NMS has been critical to ensuring that frontline health facilities, including residential aged care facilities and vaccination providing GPs and pharmacies. Aside from the COVID-19 vaccines, PPE is the strongest form of first line defence for front line workers who can provide early intervention and care for COVID-19 positive cases preventing hospital admissions.

Access to RATs is an effective public health measure, ensuring that people who have symptoms of COVID-19 or close contact exposure can take a fast and simple test to confirm the infection. A positive RAT means a person can immediately take individual action to prevent further spread of the virus, such as isolation and alerting their close contacts.

### **Who will benefit?**

All people in Australia benefit from the Australian Government's efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, whether it is helping deliver the care provided by our health services and health workforce, to supporting access to effective treatments and tests.

Many of these measures assist frontline health care providers, including GPs, nurses, aged care workers, and pathologists to deliver necessary care and services to patients, including those with COVID-19.

Australians experiencing poor mental health and wellbeing will benefit from continuing support for dedicated mental health support and services.

Targeted measures will support Australians in regional, rural and remote Australia, as well as vulnerable cohorts including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, senior Australians, people with a disability and those more likely to suffer from serious illness if they contract COVID-19.

### **How much will this cost?**

The Australian Government is investing \$4.2 billion over four years from 2022–23 to 2025–26.