



Response to the COVID-19 pandemic – Protecting senior Australians in aged care

The Australian Government is investing a further \$458.2 million to protect senior Australians from COVID-19, including those in residential aged care facilities (RACFs) and those receiving care in their own homes.

This commitment includes the following measures.

- \$124.9 million in the Aged Care Preparedness Measure to assist residential aged care providers to meet the costs of responding to and supporting residents through COVID-19 outbreaks in facilities and those directly impacted by floods. This will extend the Aged Care Support Extension Program grant until 31 December 2022. It also supports the ‘ready to deploy’ surge workforce, which RACFs can access during outbreaks to ensure continuity of care for residents, and provides access to intensive case management.
- \$37.6 million to continue strong infection prevention and control (IPC) leadership during the management of a COVID-19 outbreak in a RACF by supporting 2,900 aged care nurses to access critical IPC training.
- \$215.3 million to provide the aged care workforce with two bonus payment instalments of up to \$400 each, based on the most hours worked within a defined four week period, in recognition of their commitment to care for senior Australians during the COVID-19 pandemic, including home care and residential direct care, food or cleaning services. This brings total aged care workforce bonus payments to \$657.5 million through the COVID-19 pandemic.
- \$50.4 million over four years will also ensure RACFs are better placed to provide vaccinations to the senior Australians in their care through 4000 training places for Registered Nurses (RNs) in RACFs to become Authorised Nurse Immunisers (ANIs).
- \$22.1 million which will deliver continued COVID-19 polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing within RACFs to 30 September 2022.

- \$7.9 million will be provided to Primary Health Networks (PHNs) to deploy medical deputies, nurse practitioners and practice nurses to conduct home visits to COVID-19 positive patients in RACFs. This brings the total Australian Government commitment to \$24.5 million since 2021.

These new investments bring the Government's total commitment to responding to COVID-19 in aged care to more than \$2.6 billion since the outbreak of the pandemic.

Investment in aged care is also a large component of the Government's \$2.1 billion Winter Preparedness Plan. This includes \$964.9 million to secure additional personal protective equipment (PPE) for the NMS. Supplies of facemasks, face shields, gloves, gowns and goggles have been secured to assist in outbreak management, particularly at residential aged care facilities (RACFs) and other frontline health service sites.

Why is this important?

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to present a threat to Australia and the world, and our senior Australians remain among the most vulnerable populations to the virus.

The emergence of the Omicron variant and the rise in community transmission since late-2021 has had a significant impact on the aged care sector and the senior Australians who depend on its services.

Australia's vaccination rates are among the highest in the world, including among senior Australians with our aged care workforce the most vaccinated workforce.

The Australian Government is addressing the need to keep senior Australians safe. These additional investments will ensure senior Australians continue to be protected over the winter period and as the community moves to the next phase of the National Plan to transition Australia's National COVID-19 response.

These measures will continue to support aged care providers to ensure RACFs are well placed to prevent a COVID-19 outbreak and to manage outbreaks where they do occur. It also helps the sector position for the anticipated start of influenza season, which can pose a significant risk to senior Australians.

The continuation of the Aged Care Support Extension Program provides financial support to providers with costs incurred to effectively manage and respond to an outbreak and to access surge workforce to supplement their own workforce, when they must be furloughed.

The aged care workforce has been a powerhouse in helping maintain care, protect lives, and fight the spread of COVID-19 in many RACFs. The Australian Government has funded two bonus payment installments of up to \$400 each for these workers, in recognition of their hard work and dedication to the senior Australians in their care.

IPC lead nurses have been an invaluable resource for RACF managing COVID-19 outbreaks. They provide expert advice on IPC practices and are a key contact between the RACF and public health officers. This additional funding will support aged care nurses to train as IPC lead nurses, leading to an increase in IPC capability across RACFs.

Supporting RNs working in aged care to become ANIs is also helping improve the efficiency of vaccine rollouts, including for seasonal influenza and future COVID-19 vaccines or boosters if required.

Primary care support during an outbreak is essential for patient treatment and recovery. This measure provides an additional avenue to access primary care support and access to treatments now available in the community.

The spread of the Omicron variant and the rise in RACF outbreaks has driven demand for COVID-19 testing in aged care, both for (PCR) and rapid antigen testing (RAT). Testing of residents and staff of RACFs remains an important infection control measure and will continue with an extension of the existing testing contract with Sonic Healthcare.

Who will benefit?

These measures benefit the approximately 260,000 senior Australians in RACFs around Australia, ensuring that aged care providers are supported to provide critical IPC to prevent and respond to COVID-19 outbreaks.

In the event of an outbreak of COVID-19 within their RACF, senior Australians will have continued access to clinicians on site, through the home visits program delivered through local PHNs.

Australia's aged care providers and workers, in particular nurses working within RACFs, will benefit from support to deliver services which meet the care and protection needs of senior Australians, their families and the community, including IPC training, additional training for RNs to administer vaccines. The aged care workforce including home care and residential direct care, food or cleaning services have benefitted from the Australian Government's bonus payments in recognition of their hard work during the pandemic.

How much will this cost?

The Australian Government is investing \$458.2 million over four years, from 2022–23 to 2025–26.