

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities COVID-19 Health Advisory Group

Update: 15 October 2021

The Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities COVID-19 Health Advisory Group (Advisory Group) held its tenth meeting on 15 October 2021. Members include leaders from culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse communities and their representative organisations, health experts and medical and public health practitioners. The Advisory Group meets monthly and publishes a communique after each meeting. It has three Working Groups: the Communication Working Group, the Vaccination Strategy Working Group and the Data Working Group.

The Advisory Group plays a main role in supporting the Australian Government to provide an evidence-based response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It builds on the Department of Health's long engagement with culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse stakeholders. The Advisory Group gives advice on the experience of multicultural people and communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. It recommends options to lessen the health impacts of COVID-19 on people and communities from multicultural backgrounds.

Updates from this meeting

The National COVID Vaccine Taskforce (the Taskforce) gave an update on the Australian COVID-19 Vaccination Program. Individuals aged 18 and over can receive all COVID-19 vaccines Comirnaty (Pfizer), Spikevax (Moderna) or Vaxzevria (AstraZeneca). Individuals aged 12 and over can receive mRNA vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna). Primary care vaccination clinics continue to expand. On 8 October 2021, the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) advised on a third dose of COVID-19 vaccine for individuals with severe immunocompromise.

The rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination program across the Immigration Detention Network continues for consenting people in detention. The Taskforce held a workshop with members and Australian Border Force on 7 October 2021, about supporting COVID-19 vaccine uptake in the network.

The Taskforce provided a written update to members on the roll-out in community pharmacies, residential aged care facilities and for aged care workers. Participating community pharmacies can now give COVID-19 [vaccinations off-site](#). Vaccination rates among aged care residents and workers are high. The Department of Health is working with facilities and Primary Health Networks to ensure all residents and workers can get vaccinated.

Vaccination providers can enter vaccinations received overseas into the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR). This includes AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Moderna and Janssen-Cilag COVID-19 Vaccine administered on or after 1 October 2020. On 1 October 2021, the [Therapeutic Goods Administration \(TGA\) announced](#) that Australia recognises Coronavac (Sinovac) and Covishield (AstraZeneca/Serum institute of India) for incoming international travellers. The Department of Health is working with Services Australia so that providers will be able to report these vaccines too. The TGA continues to review data on other vaccines.

The Taskforce discussed the 2022 Vaccine Strategy and Rollout Plan and Booster Policy with members. The TGA and ATAGI are considering evidence for booster doses. The Commonwealth and jurisdictions have good infrastructure in place to administer booster doses if the medical advice recommends it. Members discussed ensuring clear communication once ATAGI provides advice.

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA) gave an update on the communication and consultation activities it is leading. To date, SCoA has supported community groups run 55 two-way forums in 21 languages to 1,271 people across Australia. Participants said that limited digital literacy and limited English proficiency were barriers. They also said that there are functional barriers to accessing vaccination services, although access to preferred vaccines has improved. Participants appreciated the opportunity to ask questions about safety and side effects. 22 of SCoA's member organisations in NSW contacted people over phone and social media to talk about vaccinations and build confidence to get vaccinated. Members emphasised that conversations with trusted people are important.

The Taskforce gave an update on the streamlined [COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic Finder](#) (VCF) and the multilingual helpline. The Taskforce is working on new features to improve accessibility for multicultural users. This includes showing languages spoken at the clinic and identifying if a general practice provides COVID-19 vaccines to people without Medicare. People needing an interpreter to use the National Coronavirus Helpline should call TIS National on 131 450 and ask for the National Coronavirus Helpline. The helpline will then transfer callers to a priority service. Members discussed promoting the multilingual helpline.

The Taskforce gave an update on work to improve reporting of vaccine coverage among multicultural communities. The Taskforce held a workshop with state and territory government health representatives on 7 October 2021 to discuss their reporting needs. The Data Working Group met on 12 October 2021. Members agreed on the importance of sharing reporting with the jurisdictions and partners to inform planning. Members discussed including ancestry and mental health data in the future.

The Department of Health provided an update on the communication campaign. The 'First Things First' campaign continues across television, social, radio, press and out-of-home media. Advertisements include images motivating people to get vaccinated. The Taskforce is developing information about getting vaccinated without Medicare, the availability of Moderna, vaccines for children and people aged 60 and over. The Taskforce is also developing video testimony from community members and about who are pregnant or breastfeeding getting vaccinated. The Taskforce has strengthened messaging through partnerships with multicultural media outlets.

The Taskforce will hold a meeting with members to discuss the plans and support for when people test positive for COVID-19 as restrictions ease.

The Advisory Group will meet again in November 2021.

See [Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities COVID-19 Health Advisory Group](#) and [terms of reference](#) for more information.