

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities COVID-19 Health Advisory Group

Update: 18 February 2022

The Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities COVID-19 Health Advisory Group (Advisory Group) held its fourteenth meeting on 18 February 2022. 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. On 11 February 2022, the Australian Government accepted [advice from ATAGI](#) to help Australians stay up-to-date with their COVID-19 vaccinations. ATAGI recommends all individuals aged 16 years and over get a COVID-19 vaccine booster dose from 3 months after the last primary dose. This is needed to maintain an 'up-to-date' status. A person's status will be 'overdue' if they have not had a booster within 6 months of their primary course.

On 8 February 2022, the [Therapeutic Goods Administration \(TGA\)](#) gave [provisional approval](#) to the Vaxzevria (AstraZeneca) vaccine as a booster for people aged 18 years and over. ATAGI will make recommendations on the use of AstraZeneca as a booster.

The Taskforce announced further funding to the four peak multicultural organisations for communications and consultation activities until 30 June 2022. Organisations to receive funding include:

- Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA)
- Migration Council Australia
- Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network
- Settlement Council of Australia.

The Australian Government has also increased the [CALD COVID-19 Health Small Grants Fund](#) to \$1.8 million. FECCA continues to administer grants to support more multicultural community groups to design and disseminate COVID-19 vaccine communications activities at the grassroots level.

The Advisory Group discussed rapid antigen testing (RATs). The Department of Health (the Department) has published translated resources on RATs. These include fact sheets in 63 languages on [types of COVID-19 tests](#) and on [what to do if you test positive](#). The Department is developing more translated resources about RATs. The TGA has minimum standards manufacturers need to follow so that instructions are clear and there is support for consumers using RATs. Members expressed concern about accessibility of RATs for people in disadvantaged circumstances and large families. GP-led respiratory clinics continue to test for COVID-19 for free. Concession card holders and clients in Residence Determination can get up to 10 free RATs over a 3 month period.

The Living With COVID-19 Taskforce provided an update on supports for people who have COVID-19. Members discussed at what point health authorities contact people who have tested positive for COVID-19. Members discussed the need for people who have tested positive to have support in their own language. Members also discussed the [National Coronavirus Helpline](#) (NCH), including uptake of the NCH multilingual service and training for NCH call agents to work with interpreters. The Living with COVID-19 Taskforce will continue to work with the Advisory Group on translated information and multilingual support for people with COVID-19.

The Taskforce gave an update on the COVID-19 vaccine rollout in the disability sector. The Taskforce is continuing in-reach vaccination services and establishing vaccine hubs for the aged care, disability care and childcare sectors. The Government is providing 1.2 million RATs to registered disability providers.

The Taskforce gave an update on digital and service design. A recent update to the National Coronavirus Helpline (NCH) guarantees free interpreter services for multilingual callers. From 10 February 2022, multilingual callers can call the NCH on 1800 020 080 and choose option 8 at the beginning of the call. This will connect them to the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) without a local call charge. The interpreter will then call a number to speak with an NCH call agent.

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA) presented insights from COVID-19 vaccine community consultation and communication activities. Since 2021, SCoA has run educational forums, outreach activities and focus groups to support the COVID-19 vaccine rollout to multicultural communities. SCoA has consulted with communities to understand emerging priorities and concerns to inform its February to June 2022 vaccine communications and consultation strategy.

The Advisory Group discussed COVID-19 community sentiment research and communication strategies. The Taskforce will work with members to increase awareness of ATAGI's advice about the 3 month interval between the last primary dose and booster dose. Members advocated for community organisations and the Department continuing to work together to communicate information.

The Advisory Group discussed recent CALD data work. The Department and Taskforce are continuing to improve the method for producing vaccine coverage estimates among CALD populations. The Australian Government has established a COVID-19 Mortality Taskforce to improve the quality and timeliness of data on deaths from COVID-19.

The Taskforce thanked members for their time. The Advisory Group will meet again on 25 March 2022.

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