# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group on COVID-19

# Communique Update: 5 August 2021

The [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group on COVID-19](https://www.health.gov.au/committees-and-groups/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-advisory-group-on-covid-19) (Advisory Group) was formed in March 2020 to develop and deliver a National Management Plan to protect communities. The Advisory Group also advises on health issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic response and the vaccine rollout. It is co-chaired by the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), and the National COVID Vaccine Taskforce. This communique provides an update on their work and current key focus areas.

**Pfizer vaccine rollout**

The Advisory Group welcomes the recent changes to Comirnaty (Pfizer) COVID-19 vaccine eligibility in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples aged 12 – 15 years.

On 23 July the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) provided provisional approval of the Pfizer COVID-19 for 12 to 15-year-olds. The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) has since reviewed available data on the safety and efficacy of the Pfizer vaccine in children aged 12-15 years, the risk of COVID-19 in this age group, and evidence of wider benefits and risks of vaccinating children.

Based on their review, ATAGI recommended Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 12-15 years as a priority group for vaccination. Accordingly, the Australian Government announced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 12–15 years are eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine as part of phase 1B from 9 August 2021. Read the [ATAGI statement regarding vaccination of adolescents aged 12–15 years](https://www.health.gov.au/news/atagi-statement-regarding-vaccination-of-adolescents-aged-12-15-years).

ATAGI and the Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand (CSANZ) have jointly developed [Guidance on Myocarditis and Pericarditis after mRNA COVID-19 vaccines](https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/covid-19-vaccination-guidance-on-myocarditis-and-pericarditis-after-mrna-covid-19-vaccines).

The Advisory Group continues to be a driving force in enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to access COVID-19 vaccines through the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS) and primary care sector. These sectors continues to play a vital role in protecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities from COVID-19. This has been highlighted in the following recent events and good news stories:

* On 27 July, Walhallow Aboriginal Corporation (NSW), Walhealth had a [busy first day](https://www.facebook.com/410883589378463/photos/a.642203902913096/1198532153946932/?type=3&theater) delivering the Pfizer vaccine to their community.
* On 28 July, New South Wales Health aired [#yarnupwednesdays,](https://www.facebook.com/NewSouthWalesHealth/videos/860789888147593/) a Q&A session on COVID-19 vaccines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples featuring NITV host Shahni Wellington, Dr Jan Fizzell (NSW Health) and Dr Jason Agostino (NACCHO).
* On 29 July, Broome Regional Aboriginal Medical Service (WA) celebrated administering an impressive [750](https://www.facebook.com/BROOME.BRAMS/videos/380798763467254/) COVID-19 vaccine doses.
* Also on 29 July the Koorie Youth Council (VIC) hosted a [deadly live yarn](https://www.facebook.com/koorieyouthcouncil/videos/876846686541999/) about the COVID-19 vaccines with a panel of Indigenous medical professionals addressing key questions about receiving a COVID-19 vaccine to encourage uptake in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
* On 30 July the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (NT) shared an inspiring video featuring community member Shirleen getting her second dose of COVID-19 vaccine and encouraging young women and girls to get vaccinated.
* The Yulu-Burri-Ba Aboriginal Corporation for Community Health (QLD) has thanked the 40 people who [received a Pfizer vaccine](https://www.facebook.com/pg/YuluBurriBa/posts/?ref=page_internal) at their out-of-hours clinic at Capalaba on 31 July.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people remain a priority population for COVID-19 vaccination. People can check their eligibility, book a COVID-19 vaccination, contact their health clinic or find a vaccination site nearby through the [Clinic Finder](https://covid-vaccine.healthdirect.gov.au/).

**The Advisory Group welcomes the decisions announced following the recent National Cabinet meetings:**

National Cabinet met on 30 July 2021 to discuss Australia’s COVID-19 response, recent outbreaks of COVID-19 and the Australian COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy.

National Cabinet agreed in-principle to an updated four-step [National Plan](https://www.pm.gov.au/sites/default/files/media/national-plan-to-transition-australias-national-covid-19-response-30-july-2021.pdf) to transition Australia’s National COVID-19 Response (National Plan) taking into account the Doherty Institute’s COVID-19 modelling and the Australian Government’s Department of Treasury’s economic analysis. This Plan involves vaccinating 70% of the adult population before lockdowns and restrictions start being reduced.

The Advisory Group acknowledges the importance of ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples remain a priority population in achieving this level of vaccine coverage, and that vaccination rates across all population groups need to be very high for the country to open up safely.

**Current statistics**



As at 2 August 2021, there have been 183 confirmed cases of COVID‑19 reported in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people since the start of the pandemic, representing approximately 0.5% (184/34,311) of all confirmed cases.

There have been no deaths recorded for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

With respect to the number of vaccinations, there have been over 148,767 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia who have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine (about 25.5% of the of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population aged 16 years and over) and 70,244 (12%) have received second doses.

**Resources**

The whole community plays an important role in stopping the spread of COVID-19. A range of resources are available on the Department of Health [website](http://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/advice-for-people-at-risk-of-coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples-and-remote-communities) to help you stay informed about the risks of COVID-19 and how to protect yourself and others.

The Department of Health provides regular electronic newsletter updates about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander response to COVID-19. [Subscribe](https://health.us19.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=5d358769e5f779a1a830c2bd0&id=685bb3b3b8) to directly receive these updates.