
Advisory Committee on the Health Emergency Response to Coronavirus (COVID-19) for People with Disability Meeting 5 July 2022 – Summary of Outcomes

Committee members with lived experience of disability and carers requested information on:

- recent subvariants of SARS-CoV-2 and whether they have implications for people with disability
- the efficacy of fourth doses of the COVID-19 vaccine over time
- whether the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) is considering recommendations on fifth doses, and
- a pre-exposure medicine called Evusheld.

Members also raised the following issues:

- reluctance of some people with intellectual disability to leave their homes because of fear of COVID-19, and
- knowledge of COVID-19 treatments among general practitioners (GPs).

The Department provided an overview of changes to telehealth that came into effect on 1 July 2022. This included the cessation of temporary Medicare Benefits Scheme (MBS) items introduced following the emergence of the Omicron variant. Permanent MBS telehealth items introduced on 1 January 2022 remain in place.

The Committee discussed the availability of telehealth and video consultations, the decision making behind MBS rules, and the role of research and consultation in decision making and review of MBS items.

Members provided feedback on the importance of consulting the disability sector and people with lived experience in the design of Medicare policy and MBS items. The Department provided an overview of the Continuous Review process by the Medicare Review Advisory Committee, which provides opportunities for engagement.

The Commonwealth provided updates to the Committee on:

- the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee's consideration of eligibility criteria for oral COVID-19 treatments
- the project to review and report on the lessons learned by the Committee. The Committee agreed that they would share a draft report with the National Disability Strategy Advisory Council.
- the development of guidance for:
 - people with disability on the importance of planning for COVID-19, and
 - disability providers on what they can do if a substitute decision maker withholds consent of vaccination. This guidance has since been finalised and published on the Department's website.
- the establishment of a [winter relief workforce](#), for short-term deployments, to cover potential workforce shortages and critical shifts over the winter months, and
- recent communications for people with disability, including videos on making a health plan for winter, COVID-19 and influenza vaccination, and treatments for COVID-19. The Department is also developing animated videos on the importance of preparing a COVID-19 Plan.

Members requested the development of communications to emphasise the importance of COVID-19 vaccination for people who have already had COVID-19 and may have experienced limited symptoms.

The Committee discussed COVID-19 vaccination rates among people with disability in supported accommodation and if it was possible to apply learnings from in-reach vaccination in aged care in these settings. It was proposed that the Committee should invite a disability provider to present on how it reached high vaccination rates among its clients.

Next steps

The Department will:

- invite a medical adviser to attend the Committee's next meeting to provide more information on new subvariants of SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19 vaccination
- provide the Committee information on Evusheld

- consider options to provide GPs with more information about COVID-19 treatments, and
- develop messaging around the importance of COVID-19 vaccination for those who have contracted COVID-19.

The Committee will discuss strategies to improve vaccination rates among people with disability in supported accommodation at its next meeting.

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled for 19 July 2022.