
Advisory Committee on the Health Emergency Response to Coronavirus (COVID-19) for People with Disability Meeting 2 August 2022 – Summary of Outcomes

Committee members with lived experience of disability and carers raised the following issues:

- availability of P2/N95 masks for disability support workers in appropriate sizes as some workers are having trouble finding P2/N95 masks that fit them
- whether data can be provided on the vaccination status of people with disability who have died from COVID-19, and
- how the Department will help people understand where they are in their COVID-19 vaccination course.

The Department of Social Services provided an update on the scenario testing workshop it held on 18 July. Around 35 people participated, representing the disability sector and Commonwealth and state and territory governments. The workshop tested two scenarios against the following themes:

- infection prevention and control
- communication and engagement
- vaccination
- workforce
- overall view of the response to date.

Main themes of participant feedback included:

- communication
 - Give consistent, clear and accessible messaging to people with disability, carers and workers.
 - Engage people with disability who are already active on social media and countering misinformation.
 - Reach people with disability who are not on the NDIS.
 - Proactively communicate public health advice as it evolves, to reduce fear.
- co-creation
 - People with disability and the workforce have expertise which can inform the response.
 - COVID-19 has varied and wide-reaching impacts and requires a collective community response.
- systems and governance
 - Improve data availability and accessibility.
 - Address inconsistency and complexity in public health orders.
 - Recognise the intersection between health and disability.
 - The health system needs to fit people with disability and not the other way around
 - COVID-19 is not over. Complacency cannot take hold in system design.
 - Acknowledge the ongoing impacts on people with disability, many of whom remain in isolation.
- workforce
 - The workforce needs to be acknowledged and supported to do their jobs through training, job security, entitlements.
 - A detailed workforce strategy is required.
 - Providers need certainty about available supports.
 - All conversations about safety must include people with disability.

The Department of Social Services will engage, co-design and update the Committee on progress of actions arising from this exercise as appropriate.

Jo-Anne Hewitt, CEO of disability support provider Achieve Australia (Achieve), presented on how Achieve has attained high COVID-19 vaccination rates among the people it supports. This included:

- conducting an ongoing, person-centred campaign emphasising the rights of people with disability to look after their health, receive safe supports and to return to the community as soon as possible
- messaging for clients, their families and supporters around how imperative vaccination is for people with disability, and
- maximising clients' access to vaccination and information about vaccination. With the support of a local doctor, achieve arranged opportunities for vaccination in different locations, including parks.

James Wooller, a program director at Vitality Works, presented on his organisation's experiences as a Commonwealth Vaccine Administration Partners Program provider. He emphasised the need for flexibility, patience and understanding of peoples' different disabilities when providing vaccination.

The Committee discussed potential strategies to increase vaccination rates among people with disability.

NEXT STEPS

The Department will:

- work with Primary Health Networks and the NDIA on potential options for mask fitting services for disability support workers
- give an update on the availability of data on the vaccination status of people with disability who have died from COVID-19 at the Committee's next meeting, and
- summarise the Committee's suggestions on steps to improve vaccination rates among people with disability. The Department will circulate that summary for the Committee's input.

The Department of Social Services will provide the Committee with a summary of its recent COVID-19 scenario testing workshop.

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled for 16 August 2022.