Advisory Committee on the Health Emergency Response to Coronavirus (COVID-19) for People with Disability Meeting 11 October 2022 – Summary of Outcomes

Committee members with lived experience of disability and advocates raised concerns about [National Cabinet’s decision](https://www.pm.gov.au/media/meeting-national-cabinet-1) to end:

* mandatory isolation requirements for COVID-19 from 14 October 2022, and
* the Pandemic Leave Disaster Payment.

The Committee:

* noted that these changes make people with disability feel vulnerable and devalued. This is because measures aimed at limiting the spread of COVID-19 to protect them and others are being removed.
* expressed concern that removing isolation requirements will pose greater risks to children with disability under 5 years old because of low vaccination rates in this group, and
* requested a targeted communication campaign to remind people that COVID-19 still poses high risk to many people in the community. The campaign should encourage COVID safe behaviours. Members emphasised the importance of this messaging given increased reliance on personal responsibility for the implementation of public health measures.

The Committee requested further information on:

* isolation obligations for disability support workers who have COVID-19, and
* financial support for casual disability support workers in high-risk settings. Services Australia has published information on who is eligible for the [High-Risk Settings Pandemic Payment](https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/who-can-get-high-risk-settings-pandemic-payment?context=63408#a1).

The Commonwealth’s Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Prof Michael Kidd AM, provided an update on COVID-19 epidemiology and changes to isolation requirements:

* Australia is currently experiencing lower levels of community transmission, and lower numbers of reported cases, hospitalisations and deaths. However, there is likely some underreporting of COVID-19 cases
* the Australian Government continues to monitor current epidemiological trends in Europe to inform its approach
* COVID-19 vaccination and COVID-19 oral treatments continue to be important protections against the more severe impacts of COVID-19
* the Australian Government recommends that isolation period remain for people working in high-risk settings. States and territories will provide guidance for workers in high-risk settings

The Department also provided information on the availability of the Moderna Spikevax bivalent vaccine and current COVID-19 vaccination recommendations.

Members noted that the complexity of vaccine dose recommendations are creating some confusion in the community.

The Department’s Health Economics and Research Division presented on the progress of:

* the integration of COVID-19 mortality and intensive care unit data into the linked data asset
* work to improve the availability of data on the use of COVID-19 antivirals.

The Committee discussed:

* analysis of COVID-19 mortality by disability type, considering regulatory requirements to revealing small counts, and
* the sensitivity of mortality data to methodological decisions. The Committee stressed the need for a robust methodology to underpin this work.

The Department gave an update on COVID-19 communications. This covered:

* messaging on changes to isolation requirements, and
* how advertising campaigns are targeting those at greater risk of severe illness from COVID-19. These campaigns focus on vaccination and access to COVID-19 treatments.

In recent meetings the Committee has discussed ways to increase vaccination rates for people with disability. The Commonwealth reported on its response to those suggestions. This included developing communication strategies that disability providers can use to support vaccination for people with disability.

A Committee member tabled a statement titled, [Sick, Sad and Shut in – COVID 19 and people with disability](https://www.advocacyforinclusion.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Shared-statement-and-report-AFI-COVID-as-at-29-Sept-1.pdf). The statement summarises outcomes of a forum run by Advocacy for Inclusion, offering reflections on the management of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee will discuss a [report on COVID-19 and people with disability](https://www.advocacyforinclusion.org/white-paper-on-covid-19-and-people-with-disability/) endorsed at that forum, at the Committee’s next meeting.

The Committee and the Australian Disability Strategy Advisory Council have received a draft report developed by Nous Group on the lessons learned by the Committee over the course of the pandemic. Feedback on that report is due on 24 October 2022.

# NEXT STEPS

The Department will:

* communicate the Committee’s concerns about the winding back of COVID-19 control measures to the Department’s executive
* investigate how regulatory requirements and statistical considerations may impact analysis and reporting of COVID-19 mortality data for disability types with small counts, and
* circulate a document to the Committee which summarises COVID-19 vaccine dose recommendations.

The Committee’s data working group will consider the issues raised about the methodology used to obtain COVID-19 mortality data for people with disability at its next meeting and report outcomes to the Committee.

The Committee’s next meeting agenda will include:

* Nous Group’s report on the lessons learned by the Committee
* the Commonwealth’s response to the Committee’s recommended actions to improve vaccination rates among people with disability, and
* Advocacy for Inclusion’s [report on COVID-19 and people with disability](https://www.advocacyforinclusion.org/white-paper-on-covid-19-and-people-with-disability/). The Committee Secretariat will invite Advocacy for Inclusion to present this report to the Committee.

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled for 8 November 2022.