



### COVID-19 Position Paper No.3: Volunteering, Vaccinations and Being COVIDSafe

Volunteering Australia is urging all organisations to ensure they are aware of the most up to date advice which applies within their jurisdiction. As you will be aware, Federal and State/Territory government advice on COVID-19 restrictions is subject to ongoing change.

This paper was updated on 13 August 2021, with new information on mandating of vaccines in aged care.

This paper was updated on 26 July 2021.

Amendments/Additions include:

- Revisions to general COVID-19 vaccination guidance as it applies to volunteers.
- Addition of material on **mandating** of COVID-19 vaccinations in aged care and disability care.
- Addition of material on **reporting** of COVID-19 vaccinations.

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## Introduction

Volunteering Australia and the State and Territory volunteering peak bodies are providing guidance to volunteers and volunteer involving organisations as the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve.

This position paper complements two earlier position papers:

- COVID-19 Position Paper No. 1: Volunteering and National Policy Settings
- COVID-19 Position Paper No. 2: Safeguarding Volunteers and Volunteer Involving Organisations

This paper focuses on two specific issues that are vital to living in a COVID-19 world:

- COVID-19 Vaccinations
- Infection Control and Being COVIDSafe

This position paper sets out our shared views on how volunteers can be safeguarded during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, drawing on official sources of advice and expertise. The primary sources of official advice drawn upon in relation to the COVID-19 vaccination roll-out are:

- The COVID-19 Vaccination National Roll-out Strategy<sup>1</sup>.
- The 'Staff' definition<sup>2</sup> for Phase 1a inclusion in residential aged and disability care facilities.
- The Slide Deck<sup>3</sup> on Priority groups in Phase 1b.
- National Cabinet Statements on the vaccine roll-out<sup>4</sup>.
- Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) Statements<sup>5</sup>.

The aim of this position paper is to help guide decision-making of volunteer involving organisations and volunteers in these challenging times. This position paper is a live document and new versions will be produced as the situation and official advice change.

*This paper is by way of general information and is designed for discretionary use. It does not replace the requirement for the reader to obtain specific operational, legal, insurance, or other advice. Volunteering Australia accepts no responsibility for any errors in the information provided, nor the effect of any such errors.*

## COVID-19 Vaccinations

The Australian COVID-19 vaccination program commenced officially on Monday 22 February 2021. The national roll-out strategy identified priority populations which includes aged care and disability care residents and workers, frontline healthcare workers, and quarantine and border workers.

We know that volunteers can be essential workers and are engaged in several of the prioritised industries, such as aged, disability and health care. For example, many community aged care

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/covid-19-vaccination-australias-covid-19-vaccine-national-roll-out-strategy>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/covid-vaccination-staff-definition-for-phase-1a-inclusion-in-residential-aged-and-disability-care-facilities>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/03/priority-groups-for-covid-19-vaccination-program-phase-1b\\_1.pdf](https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/03/priority-groups-for-covid-19-vaccination-program-phase-1b_1.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.health.gov.au/committees-and-groups/australian-health-protection-principal-committee-ahppc#statements>

providers rely on volunteers; volunteer paramedics provide critical healthcare services; volunteer drivers undertake vital patient transport in urban and rural areas; and emergency and disaster agency volunteers support border control management.

If volunteers are undertaking essential frontline work, it is imperative they are given the same opportunities as paid staff to access the phased roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccines. We have been urging governments to adopt this position to help ensure the safety of volunteers and those they serve.

## How are volunteers being included in the vaccine roll-out?

Back in March 2021, the Federal Government confirmed that several key groups of volunteers had been included in Phase 1b of the roll-out.

### Phase 1b<sup>6</sup>

- Anyone who is working in a healthcare setting. We were advised by the Australian Government that this includes volunteers, for example hospital and palliative care volunteers as they are in an at-risk 'workplace' setting.
- Disability and aged care support volunteers who provide support to people in their homes, respite care, educational, employment, leisure and/or residential settings, including those providing transport and advocacy services (see slide 12 of the Phase 1b slide deck).
- Rural Fire Service and State Emergency Service volunteers (see slide 7 of the Phase 1b slide deck).

Since then, the vaccination roll-out has not proceeded as was anticipated. However, it remains the case that volunteers in the above categories (i.e., healthcare, disability and aged care, and emergency services) are a priority and are entitled to be vaccinated irrespective of the age cohort to which they belong. Volunteers need to provide evidence of their priority status through a letter from the organisation where they volunteer or through completion of the Eligibility Declaration Form<sup>7</sup>.

We continue to call on the Federal Government to ensure that information regarding volunteering is easily accessible on the Department of Health website and included in the COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility Checker<sup>8</sup>.

## Is there a mandate for workers (paid and volunteers) to get vaccinated?

As of 13 August 2021, the Federal Government has made the following statements about mandating vaccinations:

- On Monday 28 June, National Cabinet agreed that the COVID-19 vaccination of **residential aged care workers** would be mandatory by 17 September 2021, when all workers are required to have at least the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine<sup>9</sup>. On 3 August, the

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/03/priority-groups-for-covid-19-vaccination-program-phase-1b\\_1.pdf](https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/03/priority-groups-for-covid-19-vaccination-program-phase-1b_1.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/03/covid-19-vaccination-eligibility-declaration-form.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/covid-19-vaccine-eligibility-checker>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-greg-hunt-mp/media/support-for-mandatory-vaccination-of-residential-aged-care-workers>

Government clarified that volunteers engaged by residential aged care facilities were included in the workforce scope defined by the AHPPC.<sup>10</sup>

- The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) has recognised that mandating vaccination could have consequences for the availability of the workforce, which could impact the quality and safety of resident care. AHPPC therefore recommended that a robust risk and benefit assessment<sup>11</sup> be completed and provided to National Cabinet by early August. This assessment is to include proposed mitigations to be planned ahead of implementing the mandate.
- On 6 August, the Government announced incentive payments to support primary care COVID-19 vaccination providers to offer vaccinations to residential aged care and disability support workers through dedicated workplace-based clinics<sup>12</sup>. The incentive payment will be made available to general practices, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS) and Commonwealth Vaccination Clinics (CVCs) where a minimum of 50 cumulative COVID-19 vaccination doses are provided to aged care and disability support workers across facilities as part of on-site vaccination clinics. Volunteers can be counted within the 50 required doses if they are engaged by a residential aged care facility and the doses have been allocated for clinics at residential aged care facilities.
- The AHPPC is still considering whether vaccines should be mandatory in **home aged care** and there has been no announcement on the impact on ancillary programs that involve volunteers, such as patient and passenger transport.
- On Friday 9 July, National Cabinet announced that COVID-19 vaccinations would **not be made mandatory for disability support workers at this stage**.<sup>13</sup>
- The AHPPC recommended that the National Cabinet "strongly encourage all disability workers to get vaccinated against COVID-19." The Council also recommended that in August 2021 the Cabinet should consider making it mandatory for disability support workers who support NDIS participants in high-risk disability residential settings to receive at least their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine by 31 October 2021.<sup>14</sup>

As the Federal Government considers mandating of vaccinations, we are urging them to explicitly consider volunteers and the different risks and challenges of mandating vaccinations for volunteers.

We understand some organisations are considering whether they can require their workers (paid and volunteers) to be vaccinated. This is a complex legal issue, and the potential safety benefits need to be balanced against other legal issues such as discrimination claims. If your organisation wants to put mandatory requirements in place (for example, making vaccination a requirement for volunteering), you may need legal advice. Justice Connect will be providing regular updates on this issue on their website<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> [https://mcusercontent.com/1108de8332cef333bc1956686/files/bc552c1f-874d-d138-bd3d-82835e658499/Mandatory\\_Vaccination\\_of\\_Aged\\_Care\\_Workers.pdf](https://mcusercontent.com/1108de8332cef333bc1956686/files/bc552c1f-874d-d138-bd3d-82835e658499/Mandatory_Vaccination_of_Aged_Care_Workers.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.health.gov.au/news/australian-health-protection-principal-committee-ahppc-statement-on-residential-aged-care-worker-covid-19-vaccination>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-greg-hunt-mp/media/on-site-vaccinations-for-aged-care-and-disability-workers>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/national-cabinet-statement-7>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.health.gov.au/news/australian-health-protection-principal-committee-ahppc-statement-on-mandating-vaccination-among-residential-disability-support-workers>

<sup>15</sup> <https://justiceconnect.org.au/covid19/> For example see, [https://www.nfplaw.org.au/sites/default/files/media/Volunteers\\_and\\_COVID-19\\_vaccine\\_Cth.pdf](https://www.nfplaw.org.au/sites/default/files/media/Volunteers_and_COVID-19_vaccine_Cth.pdf)

Good two-way communication between both volunteers and volunteer involving organisations will be helpful for planning and ensuring service delivery continues for vulnerable people relying on these services.

## Do organisations need to collect data or report on vaccinations?

As of 15 June 2021, residential aged care providers have been required to ask their workers (including volunteers) whether they have received a COVID-19 vaccine, and to report this information to the Federal government on a weekly basis.

As of 13 July 2021, vaccination reporting has been extended to parts of the in-home and community aged care sector<sup>16</sup>. From 13 July 2021, approved providers of Home Care Packages (HCP) and Short-Term Restorative Care (STRC) services in home or community settings are required to keep records of workforce COVID-19 vaccinations. From 27 July 2021, HCP and STRC service providers must report weekly through the My Aged Care provider portal.

As of 19 July, record keeping and reporting on workforce COVID-19 vaccination is being deferred (**i.e., not yet required**) for Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program (NATSIFAC) services in home and community settings.

Mandatory reporting is not yet required of disability service providers.

## How does the vaccine work?

The vaccine is designed to offer protection from the COVID-19 virus, helping to prevent serious illness or death<sup>17</sup>.

Scientific evidence is emerging that demonstrates the vaccines also help to stop or reduce the transmission of COVID-19<sup>18</sup>. This matter is being closely monitored internationally and by the Australian government.

It remains vitally important that COVID-19 safe work practices are in place and implemented, which includes undertaking regular risk assessments and ensuring all workers and visitors are engaging in good hygiene and physical distancing, and that PPE is used if and when required.

All workers should be encouraged to rely on reputable sources of information, such as the Australian Government Department of Health and the State/Territory equivalent government bodies.

## What steps should volunteer involving organisations take to prepare for the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out?

Volunteer involving organisations should be making sure that they are aware of State/Territory Government and industry-specific advice on the roll-out strategy relating to their jurisdiction and industry.

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<sup>16</sup> [https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/07/covid-19-vaccination-guidance-for-in-home-and-community-aged-care-providers-on-reporting-of-covid-19-vaccinations-of-the-workforce\\_0.pdf](https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/07/covid-19-vaccination-guidance-for-in-home-and-community-aged-care-providers-on-reporting-of-covid-19-vaccinations-of-the-workforce_0.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> [How do COVID-19 vaccines work? | Australian Government Department of Health](#)

<sup>18</sup> See <https://www.health.gov.au/news/top-3-covid-19-vaccine-questions-vaccines-and-stopping-transmission-virus-mutation-and-people-who-want-to-wait-for-vaccination-0>

Considering the following questions can help organisations to prepare:

- Are you clear on which employee and volunteer roles in your operation are eligible for early phase roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine?
- Have State/Territory governments or industry sectors (such as aged care, primary health etc.) mandated the requirement for a COVID-19 vaccine for certain roles?
- If you are considering mandating the vaccination for some roles, have you sought legal advice?
- Are your volunteering policies up to date with regards to which volunteering roles are eligible for or require the COVID-19 vaccine to continue in that role?
- Are volunteers included in communications, so they understand any changes to their role or eligibility to continue to volunteer?
- If it is determined that certain roles require individuals to be vaccinated, are there other roles available to transition volunteers who are ineligible for the vaccine at this stage or who choose not to be vaccinated?
- Do you have sufficient volunteer resources to continue to operate programs, as a result of any changes that result from the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out?
- Have you updated your volunteer records to include capacity to record any vaccination certificates?

All organisations should maintain communication with and, if necessary, seek direction from your government agency partners/service agreement providers (for example, funding bodies).

What if it is not clear how the vaccine roll-out will affect my volunteering program or role?

Volunteer involving organisations and volunteers can contact their [State and Territory volunteering peak](#) body to discuss their concern.

The Federal Department of Health has an [enquiry portal](#) and can be contacted by [email](#).

[Safe Work Australia](#)<sup>19</sup> has information about vaccines and the roll-out across industry groups.

The Federal government has developed the [COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility Checker](#). People in Australia can use the checker to see in which phase they will be eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.

## Infection Control and being COVIDSafe

Vaccines are only one part of keeping workers and the community safe and healthy. It is important to continue to practise COVID-19 safe work practices, which includes undertaking regular risk assessments and ensuring all workers and visitors are engaging in good hygiene and physical distancing.

Safe Work Australia has a [bank of resources](#)<sup>20</sup> to help organisations be COVIDSafe, including specific advice for protecting volunteers<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> [COVID-19 Information for workplaces | Safe Work Australia](#)

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces>

<sup>21</sup> [Volunteers and COVID-19 | Safe Work Australia](#)

Volunteer involving organisations may be eligible for grants to support COVIDSafe working practices. For example, in October 2020, the Federal Government together with state and territory governments established an \$80 million Infection Control Training Fund<sup>22</sup> to fast-track fee free (or low fee) infection control training to support the re-opening of customer-facing businesses nationwide.

The Federal government has confirmed with state and territory government contacts that volunteers are eligible to be included to receive training under the Infection Control Training Fund. Further information on the ICTF Fund and availability by state and territory is available [here](#).

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.dese.gov.au/covid-19/announcements/subsidised-infection-control-training-fast-tracked-re-opening-businesses>

## Authorisation

This submission has been authorised by the Chief Executive Officer of Volunteering Australia.



Mr Mark Pearce  
Chief Executive Officer

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## Endorsements

This position statement has been endorsed by the seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies.



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## About Volunteering Australia

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering, working to advance volunteering in the Australian community. The seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies work to advance and promote volunteering in their respective jurisdictions and are Foundation Members of Volunteering Australia.

Volunteering Australia's vision is a strong, connected, and resilient Australian community through volunteering. Our purpose is to lead, strengthen, and celebrate volunteering in Australia.



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**The Centre for Volunteering (NSW)**  
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