

Volunteers and COVID-19 Vaccinations: Information Sheet (26 July 2021)

The Australian Government advises vaccination is the most effective protection against COVID-19.

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

The Australian COVID-19 vaccination program commenced officially on Monday 22 February 2021. The national roll-out strategy identified priority populations who were to receive the vaccine in the earlier phases. In March 2021, the Federal government confirmed that several key groups of volunteers had been included in Phase 1b of the roll-out. Phase 1b¹ was to include:

- **Anyone who is working in a healthcare setting.** We were advised by the federal 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 healthcare, disability and aged care, and emergency services volunteers 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 Form².

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

As of 19 July 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 vaccine³.
- The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) has recognised that mandating vaccination for this cohort could have consequences for the availability of the workforce, which could impact the quality and safety of resident care. AHPPC have therefore recommended that a robust risk and benefit assessment⁴ be completed and provided to National Cabinet by early August.

¹ https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/03/priority-groups-for-covid-19-vaccination-program-phase-1b_1.pdf

² <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/03/covid-19-vaccination-eligibility-declaration-form.pdf>

³ <https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-greg-hunt-mp/media/support-for-mandatory-vaccination-of-residential-aged-care-workers>

⁴ <https://www.health.gov.au/news/australian-health-protection-principal-committee-ahppc-statement-on-residential-aged-care-worker-covid-19-vaccination>

This assessment is to include proposed mitigations against workforce decline to be planned ahead of implementing the mandate.

- 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.**⁵
- 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 2021.⁶

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 basis⁷.

As of 13 July 2021, vaccination reporting has been extended to parts of the in-home and community aged care sector⁸. 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 or any other government-funded service providers.

Further information

For the latest COVID-19 vaccine updates, visit: www.health.gov.au/covid19-vaccines

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.

<https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/contact/>

⁵ <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/national-cabinet-statement-7>

⁶ <https://www.health.gov.au/news/australian-health-protection-principal-committee-ahppc-statement-on-mandating-vaccination-among-residential-disability-support-workers>

⁷ <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/covid-19-vaccination-new-reporting-requirements-for-aged-care>

⁸ 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