Australia's COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout delivers high vaccination rates among people with disability

29 October 2021

The Government has welcomed the formal submission of the final report from the Disability Royal Commission on Public Hearing 12, which examined the experiences of people with disability through the COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout.

The Disability Royal Commission held a public hearing focusing on the vaccine program in May 2021. Since then, vaccination rates among Australians with disability have significantly increased with an ongoing focus on supporting access to ensure maximum protection from severe outcomes of COVID-19.

More than 77 per cent of NDIS participants in shared residential accommodation are fully vaccinated, and more than 217,000 (77 percent) NDIS participants 16 years and over have received at least their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, with 66 percent fully vaccinated. This is an increase of more than 186,000 NDIS participants since late May.

Minister for Health and Aged Care, Greg Hunt, said the Government has accepted six of the seven recommendations and noted the seventh, emphasising that significant progress in the vaccination rollout for people with disability has already been made.

Recommendation 4 concerns the easing of restrictions in line with vaccination thresholds being reached, which the Minster noted is the responsibility of state and territory governments.

"Many of the recommendations from this report go to measures which have already been put in place – the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic has always demanded quick assessment, response and action," Minister Hunt said.

"Our Government will approach these recommendations as important pointers to supporting Australians with disability to access and rely on the protection of a COVID-19 vaccine.

"The health response to COVID-19 and the vaccine rollout have both demanded quick action and continue to be shaped by expert advice and direct feedback to deliver the greatest possible protection and support to all Australians."

The Government has led significant consultation with people across the disability community, including active and regular engagement with people with disability, their families, carers, NDIS providers and unions. This work has helped drive vaccination rates and deliver support for people with disability and workers within the disability sector to access vaccines.

The Government refutes many findings in the report, including criticism of the COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Strategy. As a high-level document, the strategy provided an overview and pathway forward which has been adapted and updated following consultation and expert advice throughout the

vaccination program.

Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC said Australians with disability have been a priority throughout the rollout.

"Since commencing as the Minister for the NDIS I have very actively engaged with disability representative organisations, NDIS providers, sector peaks, states and territories and other disability stakeholders in relation to the vaccine rollout, " Minister Reynolds said.

"This engagement with the disability sector has directly informed portfolio actions to support people with disability to have the opportunity to access COVID-19 vaccines as soon as possible," Minister Reynolds said.

"Since the commencement of the vaccine program, people with disability in residential accommodation settings of 2 or more people, and the workers supporting them, have been prioritised in Phase 1A, with access to vaccines from February 2021 which now sees more than 77 percent of NDIS participants over 16 years of age living in shared residential accommodation now fully vaccinated.

"Many other people with a disability joined the priority list from March 2021 under Phase 1B, which specifically focused vaccine access on people with underlying medical conditions. This prioritisation is reflected in the high vaccination numbers amongst all NDIS participants, with 77 percent of NDIS participants over 16 years having received at least one dose, and impressively nearly 60 per cent of NDIS participants aged 12-15 years having received at least one dose, since becoming eligible in late-August.

"In addition, from 8 November 2021 people in high priority groups, including residents of disability facilities, will be the first eligible for COVID-19 vaccine booster shots. The booster program will roll out directly to people living in disability facilities through an in-reach program."

Resources about the vaccine strategy and how it relates to people with disability are readily available. Disability peak bodies and providers have also provided support to the Government's communication efforts, disseminating accurate and accessible COVID-19 disease and vaccine information.

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