



Dear Approved Provider

I am writing again in relation to the COVID-19 vaccine boosters – to congratulate all providers who have clearly been focused on increasing the level of vaccination among their residents, and to encourage providers with lower vaccination rates to continue working on lifting these rates with some urgency.

Australia is achieving pleasingly high overall rates of vaccination in residential aged care services. At the same time, there is still a significant gap between the highest and lowest rates achieved to date across the sector, particularly in relation to the booster shot. This gap presents a heightened risk to some aged care residents, especially as we draw closer to the cooler months when there is typically some escalation in risks to residents posed by respiratory viruses.

The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (the Commission) is reviewing provider data to identify services with lower vaccination rates. We will be seeking to understand the reasons why higher rates have not yet been achieved. In the event of an outbreak, these services are more likely to experience rapid transmission of the COVID-19 virus among residents, longer and more widespread restrictions, and adverse outcomes for residents.

Please ensure that your information about resident and staff vaccinations is frequently updated on the My Aged Care portal to ensure accurate reporting for your service.

I also encourage you to review your unvaccinated or incompletely vaccinated residents to understand the issues and plans for each of them. This activity is an integral part of your responsibilities under the Aged Care Quality Standards (including the minimisation of infection-related risks).

To move towards full implementation of vaccine boosters in your service, you may wish to consider whether any of the following factors need to be addressed:

- cultural issues among your residents – it may be appropriate to seek input from religious or community leaders to assist your efforts.
- staff or management behaviours where vaccination is not strongly encouraged and supported at a service.
- current access to the service for general practitioners including access or support for discussions on the benefits of vaccination.
- any difficulties being experienced in obtaining consent, including ensuring that where a resident has legal capacity they are the decision maker, and where they cannot give their own consent, that a legally authorised consent contact is identified.

- any perception that the service is and will remain at low risk because of low local community transmission – which is an unrealistic assumption given the high transmissibility and ease of spread of the Omicron variant.
- any outstanding requests by residents or their authorised representatives for the resident to maintain an “up-to-date” COVID-19 vaccination status (including timely access to the vaccine booster dose).
- a lack of understanding of the potential benefits of vaccination even for individuals approaching end of life, given that it may allow for more social contacts and reduce the risk of severe, extremely debilitating symptoms, hospitalisation, intensive care and isolation.

Further information on the aged care vaccination booster arrangements, including information on the vaccination reporting requirements, has been published on the **Australian Government Department of Health website**. This information includes fact sheets and other resources you can use for communicating with residents and their families.

Thank you for the continued effort and attention you are giving to minimising the impact of COVID-19 on older Australians receiving residential aged care.

Yours sincerely

J. M. Anderson

Janet Anderson PSM
Commissioner

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