



**Australian Government**

**Department of Health,  
Disability and Ageing**



**Australian Government**

**Aged Care Quality and  
Safety Commission**

## **WINTER PREPAREDNESS IN RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE HOMES**

Dear Board Chair

Thank you for your continued leadership and the Board's commitment to safeguarding the health and wellbeing of older people in your care.

As we approach the 2026 winter season, we ask Boards to ensure their organisation provides **timely, free access to all recommended vaccinations** for residents and workers and actively promotes their importance. Our campaign this year is focusing on reminding people that "Vaccination is the best preparation".

Older people are a priority population under the *National Immunisation Strategy 2025–2030*. In fulfilling governance obligations under the *Aged Care Act 2024* and *Aged Care Rules 2025*, providers must be well prepared to manage respiratory illness – particularly influenza and COVID-19. High vaccination coverage of residents and staff remains the most effective measure to reduce outbreaks in facilities and the risk of serious illness, hospitalisation and death.

### **Aged care vaccination expectations for 2026**

Providers are required to:

- offer **free influenza and COVID-19 vaccinations** to all residents and workers
- offer **free shingles and pneumococcal vaccinations** to all National Immunisation Program (NIP) eligible residents
- actively **promote the benefits** of vaccination to stay well and healthy and be winter-ready.

### **Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)**

From 15 May 2026, a single dose of the Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) vaccine Arexvy®, will become free under the NIP and recommended for adults aged 75 and over and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 60 years and over.

RSV is a common virus that causes upper and lower respiratory tract infection. RSV can cause serious illness, complications and hospitalisation in otherwise healthy adults.

Residents can safely receive an RSV vaccination at the same time as, or separate to, other recommended vaccines, such as COVID-19, influenza, shingles and pneumococcal vaccines. Your support in providing access to this vaccine for your eligible residents will be greatly appreciated.

## **Influenza and COVID-19**

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) recommends that influenza vaccination occur each year before the onset of each influenza season. ATAGI also continues to recommend that people aged 75 years and over receive a COVID-19 vaccine every six months to maintain optimal protection. COVID-19 vaccines can be safely co-administered with influenza vaccines and are free for all Australians.

Residents who have previously had COVID-19 do not need to wait six months before vaccination and may receive a dose once they have recovered and met isolation requirements.

Despite this guidance, COVID-19 vaccination rates remain variable across the sector, with just over half of all aged care homes reporting less than 50% of their residents have had a COVID-19 vaccine in the last 6 months.

Encouragingly, 78.8% of aged care residents received an influenza vaccination in 2025, up from 75.5% in 2024, according to Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) data.

### **Arranging vaccination clinics**

Vaccination is the best preparation and now is the ideal time to organise winter vaccination clinics. Providers are encouraged to work with their usual vaccination partners or explore alternative arrangements, including support from their local Primary Health Network (PHN), which can assist in sourcing GPs, pharmacists, or other primary care providers.

Providers should ensure they:

- promote vaccination benefits to residents and workers to stay well and healthy and be winter-ready
- proactively discuss, obtain and document informed consent from residents and workers
- provide regular, free access to influenza and COVID-19 vaccinations for all residents and workers
- provide NIP eligible residents with access to shingles, pneumococcal and RSV vaccinations (refer to the NIP Schedule [here](#))
- maintain accurate records of resident and worker vaccination status.

### **Australian Immunisation Register**

Services Australia administers the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) and provides [AIR access to registered aged care providers](#). We strongly encourage services to use this valuable tool to track who is due or overdue for vaccination, ensure accurate reporting and maintain reliable records. Currently, only around 20% of aged care services are registered. Support is available to assist providers with registration [here](#).

### **Planning ahead for oral antiviral treatments**

COVID-19 oral antiviral treatments save lives. They are safe, effective and available to all people aged over 70 years and others at high risk. Providers are encouraged to work with GPs now to ensure residents are assessed for suitability and informed consent is obtained in advance. Early administration significantly improves treatment effectiveness.

The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission expects providers to take all reasonable and proportionate steps to uphold the Statement of Rights when delivering care. Together, the *Aged Care Act 2024* and the Aged Care Quality Standards emphasise timely vaccination access, supported by strong governance, promotion, documentation and monitoring. This is a fundamental requirement of safe, high-quality, person-centred care.

We thank Boards for their continued leadership and oversight in ensuring services are well prepared for the 2026 winter season and continue to protect the health and wellbeing of older people.

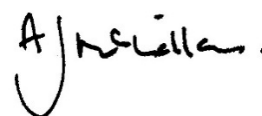
Yours sincerely



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28 April 2026