



Dear Approved Provider

Thank you for the leadership demonstrated throughout 2021 in supporting consumers and staff at your services to be vaccinated against COVID-19. As restrictions ease and jurisdictions increasingly open up, the risk of community transmission – and therefore transmission in aged care settings - remains.

On 8 November 2021, the Australian Government’s national rollout of the COVID-19 booster program in residential aged care began. All residential aged care service will be offered a booster clinic as part of the Commonwealth vaccination program. Information about the booster clinics has been provided to you by Dr James Hart from the National COVID Vaccine Taskforce (refer attached copy of correspondence).

Noting the strong international evidence in favour of a COVID-19 vaccine booster dose, the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (the Commission) strongly supports booster vaccination as an important step in ensuring a high level of protection against the worst effects of COVID-19 among consumers and staff.

The in-reach booster clinic to be made available to your residential service(s) will offer a booster dose to all residents and workers who received their second dose of a COVID-19 vaccine at least six months ago. Equally importantly, the clinic will also offer first or second doses for residents or workers who have not yet received this, and a third dose for anyone medically assessed as being severely immunocompromised.

I strongly urge you to discuss with both consumers and staff at your service(s) this opportunity to get their vaccination at the booster clinic, and to facilitate informed consent ahead of the clinic. The decision to have a booster dose is up to each individual, and the best argument in favour of it is that a booster dose is able to provide stronger protection against the risk of breakthrough COVID-19 infection.

As you are aware, you are required to ensure that aged care workers in your service(s) are vaccinated against COVID-19 in accordance with the relevant public health order in your state or territory. Failure to comply with public health orders and to enact sufficient measures to adequately minimise the risk of COVID-19 infection, including through workforce vaccination, may result in compliance action.

I previously wrote to you on 16 August 2021 to outline how the Commission will engage with individual providers, following National Cabinet’s agreement to the national mandatory vaccination requirement for residential aged care workers. As noted in that letter, all aged care providers have a legal obligation to ensure the safe, effective and quality delivery of personal and clinical care in accordance with the requirements of the *Aged Care Act 1997* and the *Quality of Care Principles 2014*.

Approved providers are currently required to keep records and report weekly the:

- total number of residents and workers at each aged care service and, of those,
- number of residents and workers at each service who have received a single dose of a COVID-19 vaccine
- number of residents and workers at each service who have received all required doses of a COVID-19 vaccine, and
- number of workers who have authorised exemptions from receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.

From 16 November, all providers are encouraged to include in your reporting, on a voluntary basis, data on:

- total number of residents at each service who have received a third dose, and
- total number of residents and workers who have received a booster dose.

The Commission will continue to receive COVID-19 vaccination data reported by providers and use this to assess risks to consumers. Providers who are failing to report, or are reporting low vaccination levels, will be assessed as higher risk.

Information about the Commission's regulatory approach to regarding compliance with mandatory vaccination requirements is available at:

<https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/sites/default/files/media/letter-commissioner-approved-providers-covid-19-worker-vaccination-16-august-2021.pdf>

The Department of Health has extensive resources available to support all residential aged care providers and facilities on the consent process, clinical governance requirements, preparation checklists and other policy guidance for your booster clinic at:

<https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/information-for-aged-care-providers-workers-and-residents-about-covid-19-vaccines/residential-aged-care-service-providers>.

In all circumstances, the Commission's response to non-compliance will be informed by the risk posed to the safety, health, well-being and quality of life of consumers.

Thank you for your focused attention and ongoing efforts on this matter.

Yours sincerely

J. M. Anderson

Janet Anderson PSM
Commissioner

19 November 2021