



Australian Government

# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group on COVID-19

Communique Update: 4 June 2021

The [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group on COVID-19](#) (Taskforce) was formed in March 2020 to develop and deliver a National Management Plan to protect communities. The Taskforce also advises on health issues related to COVID-19 pandemic response and the vaccine rollout. It is co-chaired by the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), and the Australian Government Department of Health. This communique provides an update on their work and current key focus areas.

## **The Taskforce welcomes the decisions announced following the National Cabinet meeting today**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are 16 years and older are now eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine. The AstraZeneca vaccine is preferred for adults aged 50 years and over. The Pfizer vaccine has been approved for adults 16 years and older. Vaccines are available through Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS), Commonwealth vaccine clinics, general practices, state and territory health services and clinics.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people remain a priority population for COVID-19 vaccination. To book your COVID-19 vaccination, contact your health clinic or find a vaccination site near you through the [Clinic Finder](#).

## **Pfizer vaccine roll out**

On 24 May 2021, the [TGA approved](#) an application from Pfizer Australia Pty Ltd to change its current storage conditions for its COVID-19 vaccine. This change extends the approved storage period of the unopened thawed vial at 2-8°C (i.e. in a normal refrigerator after taking out of deep-freeze conditions) at the point of use from five days up to one month (31 days). The changed storage requirements will enable much greater flexibility in the distribution of the vaccine and will have a significant positive impact on the roll out of the vaccine across Australia, including to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and remote communities.

The Taskforce acknowledges the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples being able to access a COVID vaccine through the ACCHS sector. Today's announcements recognise the critical work being undertaken by the ACCHS sector in delivering the COVID vaccine program and builds on that capacity in ensuring all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can access a COVID-19 vaccine through an ACCHS.

In preparation of the expected increase in COVID-19 vaccine supply from July 2021, the Taskforce is preparing for ACCHS commence delivering the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. The Taskforce has convened a working group to provide advice on supporting ACCHS to deliver Pfizer and other future vaccines as they become available to the program.

The Commonwealth Government will work closely with the ACCHS sector to ensure all ACCHS currently participating in the COVID-19 vaccination program will have the option to administer Pfizer vaccine.

## 2021-2022 Federal Budget and ACCHS response

The Taskforce welcomes the 2021-22 **Federal budget** announcement of an additional \$18.2 million to extend specific measures to support the successful COVID19 vaccine rollout to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations to 30 June 2022. More information about this will be provided in the coming weeks.

### Current statistics

The number of COVID-19 cases in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations remains at just 154; and there continue to be no associated deaths reported.

You may be interested to know that the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Epidemiological Report on COVID-19 \(February 2021\)](#) has been published. This report provides detailed information including the number of COVID-19 cases, and COVID-19 testing rates, hospitalisations from March 2020 – February 2021 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

As at 1 June 2021, there has been a total of just over 70,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses ordered by Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS).

As at 4 June 2021, over 62,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who have identified in the Australian Immunisation Register, have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine nationally. This number accounts for approximately 10% of the estimated eligible population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Pleasingly, the vaccination rates in Victoria in particular are very strong.

All data reported by the Australian Government can be found at [www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/australias-covid-19-vaccine-rollout](http://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/australias-covid-19-vaccine-rollout)

### Resources

A range of online resources are available if [you would like to find out more about the COVID-19 vaccines](#). These include the Department's latest newsletter update for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities which has just been sent. You can [subscribe](#) to receive these directly, or view past issues [online](#). The [GP's newsletter](#) about COVID-19 can also be subscribed to. In addition, we have updated two printable [fact sheets](#) for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander patients, with important information about what to expect after their COVID-19 vaccination. This includes updated information about thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS).

[Information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples](#) about COVID-19 vaccines can also be found on the Department of Health website.