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Outcome 1!

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Senate Committee: Community Affairs Committee

Budget Estimates 2023-2024

Outcome: 1 - Health Policy, Access and Support

Vaccine Uptake – COVID-19 Vaccine Program

BUDGET

- The National COVID-19 Vaccine Program (NCVP) has been extended until the end of 2025-26, with $490 million provided through the 2024-25 Federal Budget.

KEY POINTS

- COVID-19 vaccination is voluntary, but having all recommended doses is encouraged particularly for anyone who is at higher risk of severe health outcomes from COVID-19, including older people and those with complex health needs.
- Much of the population are currently well-protected against severe disease from COVID-19 due to 'hybrid immunity', a combination of protection from previous vaccination (including the recommended booster doses) and prior infection.
- Vaccination rates have dropped across the whole population including at risk populations, largely because of vaccine fatigue. Comparative uptake rates across the roll out are in the **Facts and Figures** section below.
- COVID-19 vaccination is free for everyone in Australia with vaccine administration either to be bulk billed and/or free of co-payment until 1 July 2025 when provider payments will align with the National Immunisation Program.
- Australia has enough COVID-19 vaccine to enable every Australian five years and over to be fully vaccinated and for eligible high-risk children aged six months to five years.
- The monovalent vaccines available (commonly known as XBB) are highly effective at preventing severe disease.
- On 29 February 2024, the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) *Statement on the Administration of COVID-19 vaccine in 2024* was published. **Appendix A** summarises current COVID-19 Vaccine eligibility.

Primary care led access

- The NCVP enables Australians to access COVID-19 vaccines through primary care including through GPs, pharmacists, and Aboriginal Controlled Health Centres:
    - Over 97% of COVID-19 vaccination doses are being provided by Primary Care channels.
    - Pharmacies administered 39% and general practices administered 56% of vaccinations in the week to 17 April 2024.
- There is targeted access support for people that: find it difficult to access primary care; are in residential aged care homes; have a disability; or are in other at-risk populations.
- Primary care is supported to administer COVID-19 vaccines through the following payments:
    - GPs - receive a flag fall of $123.00 to complete a site visit to administer vaccines; and $22.25-$53.00 per dose administered depending on the location, time of day and health professional who provided the service.
    - Pharmacists - receive a flag fall of $123.00 to complete a site visit to administer vaccines; and $27.50-$30.65 per dose administered depending on the location.

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COVID-19 vaccine supply

- Australia has secured sufficient supply of COVID-19 vaccines through to 2026. There are over 19 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines on hand in Commonwealth warehouses and at administration sites, and approximately 26 million doses remaining for delivery over the next 20 months.
- Moderna and Novavax COVID-19 vaccines are not available:
    - Moderna stock will deplete in June 2024, following the final delivery of stock under the Advanced Purchasing Arrangement with the Commonwealth. Moderna will be available again in April 2025 when doses are expected to be delivered from the Moderna onshore manufacturing facility.
    - Novavax has not been available since 1 February 2024, due to a commercial decision by Novavax to cease manufacturing in early 2023. TGA commenced evaluating the XBB.1.5 COVID-19 vaccine from Biocelect Pty Ltd (on behalf of Novavax), in November 2023. On 21 May 2024, Biocelect Pty Ltd withdrew this application, meaning that the TGA is no longer evaluating this vaccine for use or supply in Australia.
    - Withdrawal was a decision of the company and any questions relating to the withdrawal should be directed to Biocelect Pty Ltd.
- A portfolio approach is important during an emergency phase of the pandemic. Now that the emergency phase of the pandemic is over, a portfolio approach is no longer required.
- Indemnities were provided to COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers covering certain liabilities that could result from the use of their vaccine because of the unprecedented nature and circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Details of Advance Purchase Agreements with pharmaceutical companies for the purchase of COVID-19 vaccines are commercial-in-confidence and cannot be disclosed.

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