



COVID-19 Vaccination Clinics: Ensuring Access for People with Disability

Many Queenslanders with disability will be given priority access to the COVID-19 vaccine.

People with disability are a diverse group with many particularly vulnerable to adverse outcomes associated with coronavirus (COVID-19) due to underlying chronic health conditions, weakened immune systems, low health literacy levels, requirements for personal care and difficulties with physical distancing, difficulties undertaking basic hygiene measures, and a range of other challenges.

Document	COVID-19 Vaccination Clinics: Ensuring accessibility for people with disability
Target Audience	Hospital and Health Services, General Practitioners, Pharmacist and other medical professionals involved in administering the COVID-19 vaccine.
Purpose	To provide best practice guidance to health professionals involved in administering the COVID-19 vaccine to ensure equitable access for people with disability.
Supporting Documents	This document should be read in conjunction with: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Australia's COVID-19 Vaccine National Rollout Strategy• Commonwealth COVID-19 Vaccination Program Disability Implementation Plan• COVID-19 Vaccination Plan for Queenslanders with Disability• Queensland Health Vaccination Roadmap• Queensland Health Ethical Framework





Purpose

This document provides guidance on the considerations and strategies that should be implemented by health professionals administering the COVID-19 vaccine to people with disability to ensure equitable access across all healthcare settings.

Health professionals that are involved in the Queensland COVID-19 Vaccination Program are encouraged to reflect on this guidance to assist in local-decision making and planning. This will be particularly important during times of unexpected disruption, such as community transmission and/or poor vaccination rates.

It is acknowledged that the Australian Government is the vaccination lead for residential disability care settings, however, ensuring accessibility for people with disability is relevant across all phases of the rollout.

Note: Knowledge about the COVID-19 vaccine and its supply is constantly evolving and therefore Queensland Health will continue to review and update this guidance as new information becomes available.

Scope

People with disability are a broad and diverse group of individuals that have unique needs. This guidance will be relevant to people with accessibility challenges including significant mobility issues, intellectual disability, cognitive impairment, psychosocial disability or behaviour support needs etc.

Context

1 in 5 Australians live with a disability and about 85,000 Queenslanders are National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants. People with disability often require assistance with everyday activities, including self-care, mobility communication and self-management. Older Queenslanders are also likely to be living with disability, low vision, hearing, cognition, neurological and physical impairments.

The Queensland Health COVID-19 Vaccination Ethical Framework identifies six principles that underpin the prioritisation and allocation of the vaccine. Principle #4 Fairness dictates that every person living in Queensland has equal opportunity to be vaccinated by ensuring inclusive, consistent, culturally safe and appropriate processes of decision-making, implementation and communication.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 makes it against the law to discriminate against a person because of disability when providing goods, services or facilities, or access to public premises. It also requires organisations to make adjustments to their premises so that they are accessible to people with disability.

Barriers to Vaccination

A number of barriers have been identified that could prevent a person with disability from receiving the COVID-19 vaccination. These barriers range from issues that an individual might experience through to service level challenges. A person with disability may:

- be unable to provide informed consent
- fear asking for help and experience confusion across complex service systems
- have low levels of health literacy and confusion regarding the information provided
- be unable to comprehend/understand explanation of risks, processes and rationale for vaccination
- exhibit behaviours of concern or an escalation in behaviours due to change in routine and/or unfamiliar environment
- have challenges with transport, parking and physical access issues at vaccination sites
- be reliant on support workers and carers to access vaccination sites
- not be readily identified due to poor data collection methods.



Contact

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Strategies and Considerations

Service Level

The environment that the vaccination takes place can improve the comfort and confidence of people with disability. This begins at the point appointment booking through to their post-care follow up.

Queensland Health is currently working with the Commonwealth to establish in-reach vaccination for people with disability that are unable to access a vaccination site due to their complex care and support needs.

When booking the appointment:

- Interpreters:** encourage people to identify the need for interpreters before arrival at the vaccination site or as soon as possible to enable interpreter access. This could include Auslan or spoken language for people with disability from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Appointment Time:** consider if the appointment could be scheduled at a time that would reduce anxiety e.g. the first or last appointment of the day. Also allow additional time to support the individual and ensure a positive experience.
- Accessibility:** describe the layout of the vaccination site at the time of booking and request any accessibility requirements are shared. Also ask the person if they have any other concerns about accessing their vaccination that could be problem-solved in advance.

Ensure the vaccination site is accessible:

- Trained staff:** provide training to frontline staff on the different ways to appropriately engage with people with disability. This is an important step in ensuring you are providing an accessible service.
- Dedicated staff member:** nominate a staff member to identify any accessibility issues at the vaccination site each day and provide assistance to people with accessibility challenges when they arrive for their vaccination.
- Directions:** make sure there is sufficient clear, simple and visible signage to direct people where to go. Signage should be in large font, high contrast colours and a non-glare finish.
- Parking:** ensure at least one of every 25 parking spaces is accessible parking. Spaces may be marked temporarily if needed. Also ensure that there are drop off areas close to the entrance with under-cover seating.
- Access:** make sure there is a clear path to the entry with non-slip surfaces that minimises level changes and has handrails, resting places and shade (if a long footpath).
- Layout:** ensure the vaccination site is large enough so that people with accessibility challenges can still move freely when the space is crowded or busy. Where possible, automatic doors and wide doorways are preferred. Ensure that counter heights, lift buttons, door handles, etc. are within reach.
- Seating:** provide sufficient seating that is not in direct sunlight for people to wait.
- Lighting:** maintain adequate lighting levels throughout premises.
- Sensory:** minimise stimulus or offer a quiet space for people with disability to wait.
- Inclusivity:** consider displaying artwork, flags or posters that capture the diversity of the population e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse, people with differing levels of ability.

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At the appointment:

- Accessible resources:** the Commonwealth has a range of accessible [resources](#) to assist people with disability to best understand the vaccination process and requirements. It is important to make information available in a variety of formats.
 - A number of people with disability have expressed their concerns about having a needle and may have questions about the needle size. Take the time to reassure them.
- Interpreters:** ensure that interpreters are present before commencing the appointment.
- Consent:** It is important to gain full and informed consent from the person with disability and check for understanding prior to administering the vaccination. As a basic right, people with disability have the right to choose or reject health services.
 - People with disability may require information in different formats and languages. ATAGI has developed resources, including [easy read consent forms](#), to help with collecting and explaining consent.
 - The [Office of the Public Guardian](#) is able to provide consent for adults with impaired decision-making capacity, however, if the adult is expressing that they do not want to receive the vaccine these wishes will generally be respected.
 - The [NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission](#) has provided advice on the use of pre-appointment medication and restrictive practices.
- Assistance animals:** allow assistance animals at the vaccination appointment. Do not pat, talk to or distract an assistance animal. Providing assistance animals drinking fountains at the entry is a good way to show they are welcome.
- Wait time:** Advise the person of the expected wait time for their appointment. This will give the person the opportunity to wait outside if this is more comfortable to them.
- Re-scheduling:** If the clinical decision is made not to proceed with the vaccination, reassure the person that this is ok and speak to them about rescheduling. Be sure to discuss what would need to happen differently next time for them to feel more comfortable.

After the appointment:

- Provide positive reinforcement to the person and encourage them to reward themselves for being vaccinated.
- Discuss what strategies the person with disability could use that will help them remember to attend the follow up appointment.
- Provide additional monitoring should the person have experienced a psychological or behavioural escalation in response to the vaccine.



Individual Level

To make sure that the vaccine is administered in the safest, most comfortable way, it is important that health professionals listen to the person with disability, their families, support persons and/or relevant decision-makers about the communication, medical, and support needs of the person concerned.

Given the vaccine is delivered across two doses, it is important that people with disability have a positive experience at the first vaccination appointment to improve the likelihood of vaccine completion.

Communication:

- Talk directly to the person in a way that shows respect and express empathy.
- Take extra time to connect, explain the process, and calm any anxieties the person may have. The person may want to know about the size of the needle, which vaccine they are being administered, what the side-effects could be or raise other health concerns.
 - Consultation has identified that many people with disability will need additional support to understand the potential side-effects.
- Wherever possible, maintain continuity with a familiar staff member, particularly if the person has a strong fear reaction.
- Ask if there is anything that could be done to make the person feel more comfortable.
- Ask the person first if they want assistance, and if they answer yes, ask how you can best assist them. Do not assume they need assistance, or that you know what they require.
- Ask how they would like to communicate. (e.g. interpreter, gestures, signs, sounds, symbols, pictures, social stories, devices, etc).
- Provide an Auslan or spoken language interpreter.
 - If a person is deaf or has a hearing impairment make sure you face the person when you speak, move out of areas with lots of background noise and have a pen and paper to help you communicate.
 - If a person has a vision impairment identify yourself by name to them and ask for their name so you can address them directly.
- Use appropriate language e.g. use the term 'person with disability' rather than 'disabled person'.
- Respectfully check that they have understood the information provided to them.

Support Network:

- Identify and acknowledge the carer or support person as a valuable resource.
- The support person may be able to provide additional information on how the person with disability would best manage having the vaccine administered.
- Allow them to be present during the vaccination as this will offer reassurance to the person and help them relax.

Sensory:

- Encourage the person with disability to hold comfort items (e.g. blankets, toys, stress ball, iPad) if available.
- Provide active distraction. Engage with the person or ask them to do or focus on something. Consider a distraction device such as [Buzzy-B](#).
- Provide topical anaesthetics for strong pain reactions or fear of pain.
- Use reassuring touch. Be aware that some people with disability may react against this, so use touch thoughtfully and always ask beforehand.
- Clearly explain what you are about to do as you do it – particularly if people are blind or have significant vision impairment.
- Do not move someone's mobility device or personal belongings without asking.