



College Position

The College supports:

- The personal, community and public health benefits of COVID-19 vaccination particularly for healthcare workers¹.
- Mandatory vaccination for health professionals and healthcare workers who have roles which necessitate interaction with patients and members of the public.
- Vaccination for all health care professionals who do not interact with patients and the wider community.
- Ongoing priority access to vaccination for health professionals and for vulnerable Australians, especially those working in rural and remote communities.
- Equity of access to vaccination for all Australians living in rural and remote areas.

In supporting mandatory vaccination for healthcare workers, the College notes that employers should provide appropriate support and workplace arrangements to enable and encourage their employees to become vaccinated. Governments collectively need to ensure that all healthcare workers have reasonable access to vaccination, particularly in rural and remote areas.

Background

ACRRM publicly supports the rollout of the COVID vaccination program and promotes the safety and efficacy of the available vaccines when used in accordance with the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) guidelines.

The College encourages all people living rural and remote areas to avail themselves of opportunities to become vaccinated and continues to advocate for priority access to vaccination programs for rural and remote healthcare workers and equity of access for rural and remote communities more generally.

COVID and Rural and Remote Healthcare Facilities and Workers

While vaccination is important for the whole community, it is even more crucial for rural and remote healthcare workers.

Preparation for a COVID outbreak response; conducting testing; administering vaccines and in some cases, triaging and treating patients with COVID, have placed additional imposts on all general practices and health care facilities. The additional burden is more marked in rural and remote areas, where the local practitioners and health care teams may have sole responsibility for the provision of all these services in addition to continuing to deliver their usual healthcare services.

Rural Generalists/General Practitioners and other healthcare staff typically work longer hours and across a wider scope of practice than their urban colleagues. In addition to providing primary and preventative care within their community, they may also work in after hours and emergency services and procedural services to their local health facility; outreach services to adjacent communities; and in residential aged care and other facilities.

They are often the first and only port of call for both routine and emergency and primary and secondary treatment within their communities and may be treating a larger number of vulnerable patients, including those with chronic disease, multiple morbidities, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Rural health care services and facilities are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of COVID. They may be small organisations and the only provider of health care within their community. This means that all health care services may be shut down if they experience a COVID infection or exposure. In communities where numbers of healthcare professionals are limited, there is a danger that services could close completely if one or more team members were forced to isolate due to COVID exposure or illness.

Exemptions

ACRRM acknowledges that there will be healthcare workers who may have contraindications for vaccination as outlined in the [ATAGI clinical guidance on COVID-19 vaccine in Australia in 2021](#), or other circumstances which prevent immunisation.

Where possible, these people should be transferred to roles which do not involve interaction with patients or public. However this may not be possible in smaller communities where workforce numbers and roles are limited. A case-by-case approach where options are respectfully discussed to arrive at a suitable resolution, may be required.

Endnotes

- 1 Within the context of this document, the reference to healthcare workers includes all staff who have public-facing roles, including practice and hospital staff, aged care and outreach workers, and those providing locum relief.

Find out more

If you have any queries relating to this Position Statement, please contact us by:

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ACRRM acknowledges Australian Aboriginal People and Torres Strait Islander People as the first inhabitants of the nation. We respect the traditional owners of lands across Australia in which our members and staff work and live, and pay respect to their elders past present and future.