

## **First Aboriginal COVID-19 vaccination milestone reached, but a gap remains – a message to NSW General Practice**

Thanks to the work undertaken by health professionals and Aboriginal communities across the state, in mid-September NSW reached the milestone of half of all eligible Aboriginal people receiving the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

All Aboriginal people age 12 and older are [eligible](#) and are a [priority](#) for COVID-19 vaccination, yet vaccination rates in this population are below the non-Aboriginal population, in some areas by up to 30% (first dose coverage, *Source: Australia Immunisation Register, 30 September 2021*). With the easing of restrictions in NSW fast approaching, it's important to ensure Aboriginal people aren't left behind when aiming for double-dose vaccination targets.

Priority vaccination for Aboriginal people is still important because of the increased risk of acquiring and developing serious illness from COVID-19.

Everyone within General Practice continues to play an important role in ensuring Aboriginal people have priority access to a COVID-19 vaccine.

### **NSW Health asked GPs, Practice Nurses and Practice Managers to share strategies to increase vaccination rates amongst their Aboriginal patients. This is what they recommend:**

#### **Contact your Aboriginal patients and offer priority vaccination**

Advertising your vaccine-provider status helps, but pro-actively contacting your Aboriginal patients for a vaccination appointment will have a bigger impact: a phone call for some, SMS for others.

Use the opportunity to encourage your Aboriginal patients to bring their whole family/household to get vaccinated, and consider including web links to patient vaccine information in SMS message, including [Q&A's](#) and [information flyers](#).

Consider setting aside dedicated vaccination appointments for Aboriginal people each week, and ensure they are a priority when creating waitlists or when filling cancellations.

**Give people the opportunity to identify as Aboriginal by asking the question**

When people enquire about or book in for COVID-19 vaccination, asking the Aboriginal status question enables you to prioritise Aboriginal patients for appointments.

Accurate Aboriginal identification allows you to provide quality clinical care and is an opportunity to register patients for the [CTG PBS Co-payment program](#). Aboriginal identification is also key to accessing funding under the [Practice Incentives Program Indigenous Health Incentive](#). All patients should be asked the standard identification status question, consistent with RACGP [recommendations](#) and [Standards for General Practice](#).

Making your practice inclusive and welcoming for Aboriginal people encourages self-identification (for vaccination and visits for other reasons). These [practical steps](#) will help in providing culturally safe healthcare and this [printable reminder](#) will keep Aboriginal patient identification top of mind.

### **Initiate conversations about vaccination with Aboriginal patients when they attend for other reasons**

Use practice software prompts and action lists to identify Aboriginal patients during consultations, and ask about vaccination.

Information to help you discuss vaccination with Aboriginal people is available [here](#). Aboriginal Health Workers in local [Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services](#) can also support conversations about vaccination.

### **Promote vaccination to Aboriginal patients inside your practice and through other patient communications**

Take advantage of your patients' focused attention and run videos on your waiting room TV screens. The NSW Health "Yarn-Up" series is popular, so use [Episode 1](#), [Episode 2](#) and [Episode 3](#) on rotation.

Displaying [posters](#) designed for Aboriginal people and having patient [brochures](#) available helps, as does posting about vaccination on your website and social media. You can share posts from the NSW Health pages ([Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [TikTok](#)) or create your own using our [social tiles and videos](#).

### **If you don't offer the preferred vaccine, help Aboriginal patients find another provider**

If you're not providing COVID-19 vaccination, or don't have the preferred vaccine available, refer your Aboriginal patient to a local [Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service](#), an Aboriginal-specific Local Health District service or a local pharmacy vaccine provider (this may involve helping your patient make an appointment).

Not all patients will be comfortable attending mass vaccination clinics, so finding a clinic that suits their needs is important. Being familiar with other [vaccine providers](#) in your area will help. More options are coming on-line each week.

Recent improvements mean it's now easier for patients to find a clinic, register and book an appointment via the [Vaccination Clinic Finder](#). This requires internet access, so offering help to access the portal will assist.

### **If transport is an issue for your Aboriginal patients, consider offering in-home visits**

Earlier this year, the Australian Government implemented MBS new funding arrangements to improve the viability of [administering of COVID-19 vaccines via in-home settings](#). The new MBS item number (90005), when combined with [an assessment to determine a patient's suitability](#) and administering the dose itself, makes a home-visit delivery model more feasible.

[Thank you for the immense contribution General Practice is making to COVID-19 control and prevention efforts.](#)