



11 January 2022

The Hon Brad Hazzard
Minister for Health and Medical Research
GPO Box 5341
House of Representatives, Parliament House
SYDNEY NSW 2001

By email: wakehurst@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Minister,

RE: Improving vaccination reporting in NSW

I write with regard to the current uptake of COVID-19 boosters immunisations, particularly in light of the emerging and highly transmissible Omicron variant. Catholic Health Australia notes there is a need to improve awareness of current levels of community protection by updating the definition of fully vaccinated and its corresponding statistics. Both the NSW and Commonwealth governments have called on Australians to exercise personal responsibility for their COVID-19 safety going forward. In order to allow Australian's to properly manage their own risk and to incentivise booster uptake, it is important that public reporting on vaccination rates remains accurate.

Vaccination statistics

While some states have a headline 'fully vaccinated' rate approaching 95%, this is becoming an increasingly poor descriptor of the protection vaccines are providing our community. This figure assumes substantial protection is still present in those residents that were vaccinated first. We now know that COVID-19 vaccinations are losing effectiveness as soon as a few months after the second dose is received. Evidence indicates that this is particularly true of the Omicron variant, with studies suggesting a third booster can significantly increase protection. Currently, a significant proportion of those eligible for a booster shot, have not received a booster. This means they can no longer be considered fully vaccinated. A significant proportion of NSW residents under 16 are not vaccinated, due to either ineligibility, hesitancy, or lack of opportunity. In those aged 5-11, there are widespread reports of parents struggling to obtain even a first vaccination for their child. While the prevalence of serious disease among young children is thankfully low, they are still able to carry and transmit COVID-19.

In short, the effective vaccination rate is now below the reported headline rate. With that in mind, maximising uptake of boosters and improving awareness of the risk COVID-19 presents through more appropriate vaccination rate statistics will help ensure NSW' hospitals are not overwhelmed.



Inclusion of rapid antigen results

I note that from this week, NSW will begin including self-reported results from rapid antigen tests (RATs) in its COVID-case statistics, and that the Government is making the reporting of a positive result mandatory. Catholic Health Australia supports mandating reporting of individual positive RAT results. It will be the Government's responsibility to ensure that reporting these results is a simple task for NSW residents, and that the privacy of individuals is protected when they report their result.

The NSW Government is to be commended on its world-leading response to the COVID-19 pandemic thus far. Catholic Health Australia urges you to maintain this outstanding record, by taking all necessary measures to promote booster shots and increasing the accuracy and relevance of vaccination rate reporting. Please contact Alex Lynch, Health Policy Manager at alexl@cha.org.au or on 0411 841 071 should you wish to discuss this issue further.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pat Garcia". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pat Garcia
Chief Executive Officer
Catholic Health Australia