

Australian Council of Social Service

31 August 2021

Lieutenant General John Frewen
Operation COVID Shield
Email: john.frewen@health.gov.au

Dear Lieutenant General Frewen,

Taskforce and Community Sector Partnership to accelerate vaccinations of high risk “vulnerable” groups

Thank you for the ongoing important engagement with the Taskforce and the community sector.

Following further consultation with our members, I now provide recommendations to accelerate the Vaccination Plan with particular reference to high risk groups. As Dr Kerry Chant, NSW Chief Medical Officer said earlier this week:

“We are only as good as the level of vaccination of our vulnerable communities.”

Recommendation 1: Establish vaccination targets for high risk groups and by locations

Following our [Open Letter to National Cabinet](#) and briefing paper [Vaccination Targets & Data Transparency – Leave no-one behind](#), released on 19 August 2021, we are encouraged by calls for specific vaccination targets for high risk or ‘vulnerable’ groups.

We urge the Taskforce to support explicit targets to accelerate the rates of vaccinations needed, so communities are not left behind. We must move beyond a single national target as the trigger for decisions about easing of restrictions.

Recommendation 2: Deliver data transparency

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to data transparency and the progress that has been made with the release of data, including data now becoming available through the MADIP process. However, we do not yet have full transparency. As set

out in our [briefing paper](#), it is urgent that we secure published disaggregated data regarding vaccinations rates of high risk groups, as well as location level data, and across the country. Please advise what further needs to be done to secure this release in an accessible format. The data must be widely shared and understood, including by local community leaders.

Recommendation 3: Support community-led strategies to accelerate vaccinations

Thank you for the recognition of the vital role of community-led strategies, including via **communications and engagement and, community vaccination hubs**. These strategies now need to be **rapidly scaled up**.

We recommend the following:

A. Issue regular taskforce (word document) briefings and key messages

The Taskforce to provide regular, if daily, *word version* of briefings and key messages that you want amplified. These briefings can be provided to stakeholders to incorporate into communications with their constituents as appropriate, with message and messenger tailored to their needs and audiences. These briefings may be used across different sectors.

ACOSS would be a key partner for helping with delivery to our members and through the State and Territory Councils of Social Service.

B. Establish Community Flexible Fund to support Vaccinations

Establish a \$10 million community flexible fund to support community sector-led strategies to accelerate vaccinations of high risk or vulnerable groups. The purposes of this fund would be for community sector organisations to deliver either **communications and engagement** and/or **community vaccination partnerships and hubs** for high-risk and vulnerable groups by population attributes or by location. Capability built across the community sector could also be used for ongoing engagement, including for booster programs or future phases of the COVID response.

Communications and engagement: It is vital that targeted communications strategies reach and engage a range of priority audiences and high risk groups, developed by skilled and trusted community groups and networks, not government. Community sector organisations have deep expertise both to develop effective messages for their key constituents and to be trusted messengers, sometimes at arms-length to government.

We encourage the Taskforce to adopt a similar approach to the Victorian Government Flexible Fund (see more details below), The Victorian Government runs

a rolling 'COVID-19 Vaccination Program Community Engagement' grants scheme (or 'Vaccine Ambassadors' program), to:

- Promote and increase awareness of the vaccination program
- Increase the circulation of trusted, credible vaccine information
- Enhance culturally appropriate engagement.
- Dispel myths and addresses community concerns about vaccines through an evidence-based approach to communications.
- Increase health literacy

Community organisations, peak bodies, multicultural groups, community health organisations, and other social service groups and charities are eligible for up to \$50,000 of funding per round. The money can be spent on any communication or engagement activity that seeks to meet the above goals, including:

- Distribute and display Department of Health vaccination promotional material
- Display information on the organisation's website
- Display on organisations social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn)
- Campaign development or amplification
- Distribute information via email
- Display in local newspaper
- Discuss on local radio
- Conduct education/information sessions
- Facilitate a Community of Practice with industry/members.
- Other

Funded organisations are provided up-to-date messaging guides and information packs (collateral etc) to use directly, to inform their own comms. Funded organisations are *not* required to display a government logo or publicly acknowledge the government funding.

We set out below some previous examples of communications funds:

- \$12.0 million over three years from 2019-20 to enhance and extend the *Childhood Immunisation Education Campaign* to raise awareness and counter misinformation to increase rates of vaccination, and extend the eligibility for the Fluarix Tetra quadrivalent influenza vaccine provided through the National Immunisation Program to include patients from six months of age up to three years of age; <https://archive.budget.gov.au/2019-20/bp2/download/bp2.pdf#page=106>
- \$11.8 million over two years from 2019-20 to deliver a *national mental health communication campaign* and enhancements to the Head to Health website https://archive.budget.gov.au/2020-21/bp2/download/bp2_complete.pdf#page=264

Community vaccination partnerships and hubs: The growth of vaccination partnerships and hubs delivered through trusted community services and networks, is essential to success. The Flexible Fund would fund flexible supports needed by community organisations to play their essential role in vaccination partnerships and hubs.

Recommendation Four: Maintain regular feedback channels between the Taskforce and the Community Sector

Maintain the regular engagement between the Community Sector and the Taskforce, meeting as required and via written briefings. Our members have high quality intelligence for the Taskforce about what is working and what needs to be changed to remove barriers to vaccinations. ACOSS is committed to sharing this intelligence as rapidly as we can. We have agreed to maintain the effective tripartite engagement between the Taskforce and ACOSS, the BCA and the ACTU.

We sincerely thank all members of the Taskforce for the highly constructive dialogue and important progress to date.

We are keen to meet with you without delay to discuss the above recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C Goldie'.

Cassandra Goldie

Chief Executive Officer