

Answers to written questions on notice by the Royal Australasian College of Physicians

Questions asked in writing by Senator Rachel Siewert on
29 January 2021

1. What is the best strategy for reducing vaccine hesitancy and ensuring sufficient take-up of the covid-19 vaccine?

Firstly, it is important to note that Australia has high childhood immunisation rates (around 95%).¹ Adult vaccination rates are less well reported, but have increased in recent years.² These high rates suggest a positive community engagement with vaccination as a necessary health care process.

Research has demonstrated that barriers to vaccine uptake are often practical, and include lack of access to medical services, lack of social support and competing pressures. These factors should be considered in the roll-out to ensure sufficient take-up of the vaccine.

It will be important to ensure that particular effort is made to engage with priority groups, which include:

- Health care workers, because recommendations from health care workers are strongly associated with vaccine uptake.
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs) and Aboriginal Community Leaders
- Culturally and linguistically diverse communities

We note that the Government has begun implementing a communications campaign which includes a national coronavirus and COVID-19 vaccine helpline, website materials and communications in the broadcast and social media. While this campaign is welcome, it is important to ensure that communications materials and planning are informed by social research. The RACP suggests that social scientists who are experienced in vaccine uptake, such as the [National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance](#) (NCIRS) and the [Collaboration on Social Science and Immunisation](#) are involved in the development of the communications strategy.

For these groups, and the broader community, the communication plan must be flexible and adaptive in response to emerging situations and events as the vaccines are rolled out.

¹ <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/immunisation/childhood-immunisation-coverage/immunisation-coverage-data-surveys-and-reports>

² https://www.nitag-resource.org/sites/default/files/35d41f6d66dee67e02f646af0f3e106181dcbe72_1.pdf

2. What are your views on state governments using a covid-19 vaccine as a requirement for entry into certain venues and government buildings? Is this an effective strategy to encourage vaccine take-up?

The goal of vaccination is to protect individuals and the community from illnesses which are being vaccinated against. The purpose of physical distancing and other public health measures is to support achievement of this goal. Australia has very high rates of vaccination.

As the COVID-19 vaccines are rolled out, governments will need to continually monitor and review the level of vaccine uptake in the community. If it becomes apparent that concerns about vaccination safety or necessity are impacting on uptake, governments may need to consider what further measures could be implemented to encourage uptake.

Before more punitive measures are taken, such as those outlined in the question, the RACP would strongly encourage all governments to prioritise positive measures through education, communication and reducing barriers to vaccine uptake. The College would also advocate that any policy takes into account the need to respect equity and access for all members of the population within appropriate public health guidelines.