



09 March 2022

PHARMAC
Wellington
Via email

Support for the Proposal to widen access to influenza vaccine

To whom it may concern,

We are writing in support of the proposal to widen access to the influenza vaccine for the 2022 influenza season. We commend PHARMAC for applying an equity approach to extending influenza vaccines, in the recognition that Māori and Pasifika experience inequitable health outcomes and are a population considered more at risk of adverse outcomes such as hospitalisations due to influenza¹.

This will work to achieve The Ministry of Health's own goals around equity which they define as:

"...differences in health that are not only avoidable but unfair and unjust. Equity recognises different people with different levels of advantage require different approaches and resources to get equitable health outcomes²."

A lower age for eligibility for Māori and Pasifika is strongly supported by evidence around earlier onset of age-related disease and disability and persistent inequities around life expectancy³. Evidence suggests health profiles of younger Māori more frequently mirror those of non-Māori over the age of 65 years⁴.

We are concerned that this proposal only relates to the 2022 influenza season, although we note that a separate proposal for future seasons is planned. Identifying Māori and Pasifika as a population at particular risk from influenza has been a persistent feature of annual influenza reports predating the COVID-19 pandemic⁵, therefore we recommend this measure be de-coupled from the pandemic rationale and instead a permanent addition made to the Pharmaceutical Schedule in recognition of this enduring inequity in access for Māori and Pasifika.

We note concerns from clinical advisors as to the workforce capacity to extend the vaccine programme this season as the sector is mid COVID-19 vaccine roll-out, however given the concerns of reduced natural level of immunity across New Zealand as a result of previous COVID-19 border restrictions and virtually no

¹ ESR. 2019 Annual Influenza Summary. Retrieved from:

https://surv.esr.cri.nz/PDF_surveillance/Virology/FluAnnRpt/InfluenzaAnn2019.pdf

² Ministry of Health. 2019. *Achieving Equity*. Retrieved from: <https://www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/what-we-do/work-programme-2019-20/achieving-equity>

³ Ratima K, Ratima M. 2007. Māori experience of disability and disability support services. In B Robson, R Harris (eds). *Hauora: Māori Standards of Health IV*. Wellington: Te Rōpū Rangahau Hauora a Eru Pōmare.

⁴ Ratima K, Ratima M. 3

⁵ ESR. 2019 Annual Influenza Summary. 2

influenza recorded in the community for two years⁶ we agree that ensuring vulnerable populations are adequately protected this season is of paramount importance.

We recommend that models of expanding the vaccination workforce and working specifically with Māori and Pasifika providers to ascertain the best approach for roll-out is prioritised. Funding Māori and Pasifika providers to deliver to this group could be a sound approach if they agree, as they are likely already engaged with this group as result of their success in the COVID-19 vaccination space.

In summary, we strongly support this proposal on the grounds of achieving equitable health outcomes for Māori and Pasifika but would like to see it extended beyond the 2022 influenza season. We are happy to discuss this further with you should the opportunity arise.

Ngā mihi nui,



Braden Clark
Kaiwhakahaere Chief Executive
ANZASW

ABOUT ANZASW

The Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) is the professional association for social work in Aotearoa New Zealand. We have over 3,500 members who work throughout the community in both statutory social work and community social work settings. We advocate on behalf of members for social change and justice.

Definition of social work

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.⁷

Social work in Aotearoa New Zealand

Social workers in Aotearoa are required to be registered with the Social Workers Registration Board. Social workers are registered under the Social Workers Registration Act 2003 and are not included in the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003.

⁶ ESR. 2021 Annual Influenza Summary. Retrieved from:

https://surv.esr.cri.nz/PDF_surveillance/Virology/FluAnnRpt/InfluenzaAnn2021.pdf

⁷ Global Definition of Social Work - International Federation of Social Workers and International Association of Schools of Social Work