



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Health**

Your Ref:
Our Ref:
Contact:

The Honourable Mark McGowan MLA
Premier of Western Australia
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WEST PERTH WA 6005

Dear Premier

ACCESS TO PFIZER VACCINATION FOR PEOPLE GREATER THAN 60 YEARS OF AGE

Transmission of COVID-19 to West Australians over the age of 60 years has the potential to cause serious illness, hospitalisation and multiple avoidable deaths. Since the commencement of the vaccination program in Western Australia (WA), efforts have been made to ensure this vulnerable cohort was protected. Older Australians were given priority for the National Vaccination roll-out, with those over 70 years given access from Phase 1B and those over 60 years from Phase 2A. More recently, Directions making vaccination mandatory for people working in Residential Aged Care Facilities and in health care settings have allowed staff over 60 years of age to have a choice of either Pfizer or AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine.

With a small number of exceptions, including Aboriginal and other remote communities, the over 60's age group has only been eligible to receive the AstraZeneca vaccine. The rare but serious risk of Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS) has led to vaccine hesitancy, particularly in the 60-69 years age group, which is likely to be impacting on their relatively low coverage rates despite priority access to vaccine. Eligible population vaccination coverage rates in WA are 57.6% for Dose 1, with coverage rates of 89.1% for people over 80 years, 90.5% for people 70-79 years, and 77.4% for those 60-69 years. Of major concern is poor vaccination coverage rates for Aboriginal populations, including older Aboriginal people. Vaccination coverage for eligible Aboriginal people for Dose 1 is 23.7% overall, with coverage rates of 40.8% for Aboriginal people over 80 years, 57.7% for people 70-79 years and 46.9% for people 60-69 years.

Achieving a high vaccination coverage rate for older people in WA remains an urgent priority. To address this and improve our vaccination coverage rates for older people, I recommend, as Chief Health Officer, that people aged 60 years and over be offered a choice of either the Pfizer or AstraZeneca vaccines. WA has received additional

doses of Pfizer vaccine and can accommodate this change in policy to improve vaccination coverage.

WA Health will continue to follow the advice of the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) with respect to second doses of AstraZeneca vaccine. Based on current evidence, ATAGI recommends that people of any age without contraindications, who have had their first dose of AstraZeneca without any serious adverse events, should receive the second dose, as the risk of TTS following a second dose of AstraZeneca is much lower than the rare risk following a first dose.

I would recommend that Pfizer vaccine be made available to all people over the age of 12 years on or after Monday, 20 September 2021, as a first dose. WA Health has enough capacity to provide bookings for people over 60 years from this time and broadening the access will improve vaccination coverage in this vulnerable group. These changes will only apply at State managed vaccine clinics, as the Australian Government has yet to implement similar changes nationally in primary care practices or community pharmacies.

Yours sincerely



Dr Andy Robertson
CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER

13 September 2021