

MEDIA RELEASE

22 April 2018

COTA Australia welcomes compulsory influenza vaccination program to protect nursing home residents

Leading seniors' advocacy group, COTA Australia, today welcomed the Federal government's announcement that the provision of influenza vaccination programs by aged care providers to all staff in residential aged care will be made compulsory.

This follows a significant number of deaths in nursing homes in the 2017 flu season and survey findings that many nursing homes had staff vaccination levels below 50 per cent, well below the recommended 95 percent cover required for "herd cover" that provides real and confident protection.

"Last year COTA called on the government to make an immunization program compulsory and Minister for Health, Greg Hunt, and Minister for Aged Care, Ken Wyatt agreed" said COTA Chief Executive Ian Yates; "Today's announcement delivers on that promise and we warmly welcome it".

In a joint media statement this morning Minister Hunt and Minister Wyatt announced that the introduction of a vaccination program and a register for staff influenza vaccinations will be implemented for the 2018 flu season.

Mr Yates said "COTA welcomes the announcement that aged care providers will offer vaccinations and record immunisation status as an evidence based way of improving protection from seasonal influenza for older Australians living in residential aged care facilities.

"It is essential that staff vaccination rates be brought up to best practice levels rapidly, as staff have the most contact with nursing home residents and the vaccination is highly effective among staff, whereas its effectiveness declines among very old people, with most nursing home residents in the late 80s and 90s.

"COTA Australia calls on all nursing home staff to take up the offer to be vaccinated and for the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, the Health Services Union and United Voice to encourage and support their members to do so and to help drive vaccination levels to the 95% best practice level required to protect older Australians.

"We also call on all people who enter aged care facilities, including family members and visitors, to be vaccinated for the protection of all residents, including their loved ones."

COTA Australia looks forward to working further with the government, aged care providers, unions and consumers to ensure effective implementation within the short time frames required.

We also encourage all older Australians to take advantage of the government's free flu vaccination program, available to Australians over 65 through the National Immunisation Program. This year, there are two new vaccines available to provide better protection for people aged 65 years and over. If you are aged 65 years or over, speak to your doctor or vaccination provider to find out more about receiving one of the new vaccines.

Ian Yates is overseas and unable to provide live comment today but may have remarks attributed from this release. Acting Chief Executive Judy Gregurke is available throughout the day for all media.

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COTA Australia is the peak policy development, advocacy and representation organisation for older Australians, representing COTAs in every State and Territory and through them over 500,000 older Australians.