

COVID Vaccine Plan firms direction

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The Consumers Health Forum welcomes the National COVID Vaccine Campaign Plan in providing stronger and more detailed directions for Australia to counter the pandemic.

“We still face uncertainty about the future impact of the COVID virus and how best to thwart it, but the public release of the Plan, backed by the Doherty Institute’s modelling, provides the community with some assurance that there is a firmer base on which to proceed,” the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells, said today.

“The plans and modelling are detailed and complex and while that may be of necessity, there is still much we can do to get an effective message and access to vaccination for all Australians.

“We are still hearing of widespread uncertainty and confusion about how and where many people can get their jabs and which vaccine they should have.

“The tragic death of a 27-year-old man who had been ill with COVID is a sobering reminder that COVID has the potential to strike younger people. So far only four Australians under 40 have died from COVID and there have been only two cases of people in their 20s contracting the virus,” Ms Wells said.

The spokesperson for the Youth Health Forum, Roxxanne MacDonald, said “many young people have been concerned about access to vaccines for a number of months now.

“Young people’s mental health has been significantly impacted by the pandemic, and it’s being exacerbated as we struggle to get vaccinated

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while hearing that the delta strain locking down our cities is a high risk for young people. With the devastating news out of NSW and Queensland's Delta cluster linked to schools, it's a very scary situation.

"It's clear young people need to get vaccinated, particularly those in priority including frontline workers and young disabled people. However, young people are facing barriers beyond just vaccine availability. Transportation, unfamiliarity with the health system, and navigating the booking process are only a few of these hurdles. We need strong and engaging public health messaging targeted towards young people, including culturally tailored messages for migrant and refugee young people," Ms MacDonald said.

Ms Wells said CHF supports the goal of the Coordinator-General of the Vaccine Taskforce, Lieutenant General John Frewen, to make the vaccine as accessible as possible by enabling vaccine venues including retail settings, workplaces, drive throughs and pop-up hubs.

"The expectation is that anyone over 16 years old --- the government's currently-set age eligibility for vaccination --- could be able to get vaccinated from October.

"On ABC TV's *News Breakfast* this morning, General Frewen said he thought Australia had a really good opportunity to get to 70 per cent of the population vaccinated this year.

"However, he has cautioned that international experience indicated that getting above 70 per cent does require concerted effort.

"That's why CHF believes more needs to be done to ensure the pro-vaccine message gets through to all communities leveraging local consumers and community leaders, and especially those to whom health messaging is harder to reach and where hesitancy persists," Ms Wells said.

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