



MEDIA RELEASE

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Booster shots and rapid antigen testing vital for rest homes

The New Zealand Aged Care Association (NZACA) is calling on government to make booster shots available in all rest homes alongside a suite of other measures to support the sector's ongoing COVID-19 response.

Simon Wallace, Chief Executive of the NZACA, says with vaccine immunity in residents starting to wane and with community transition an ongoing reality, rest homes need additional support measures.

"The top priority is to ensure that our vulnerable older people in rest homes and the staff who care for them are prioritised for booster shots. Overseas evidence suggests immunity wanes six months after the second Pfizer dose and we are now at that point in our sector," says Mr Wallace.

"Studies also show that the booster shots increase immunity by up to 96% and are particularly important not only for older people but also those who are immunocompromised. So, it's an absolute priority that we get booster shots into the arms of our residents and the staff who care for them as soon as supplies are available."

Mr Wallace says rest homes also need access to rapid antigen testing kits as part of facilitating safe visiting and as a tool for monitoring residents and staff.

"The Government has so far been non-committal about authorising use of rapid antigen testing in New Zealand. Yet, the cost per test is minimal and we can get a result in 10-15 minutes compared to two to three days with a PCR test.

"Our rest homes in Auckland and the Waikato have been under huge pressure from families and friends who want to visit their loved ones. Everyone is concerned too about the mental health and wellbeing of residents as the extended lockdown continues. With double vaccination and rapid antigen testing, we can safely allow visiting to take place."

The sector is also calling on the Government to cover the additional costs rest homes have incurred because of the Delta outbreak and level 4 and 3 lockdowns.

"Our members have incurred costs for ongoing COVID-19 precautions, that far exceed what they would normally face. These range from extra staff costs, more security, additional cleaning measures, consumables, fit testing for N95 masks and digital communication tools so residents can connect with their families.

“The aged residential care sector’s response has been impeccable as evidenced by scarce transmission in our rest homes during the current Delta outbreak.

“The Government has stepped up to support the sector with the mandating of vaccinations for staff, which is a huge aid for our employers. Now we need government to really come to the party and deliver on these extra measures to support our ongoing work to keep New Zealand’s most vulnerable older people, their families and the staff who care for them safe.”

ENDS

For more information contact

Alice Taylor

021 02785648

www.nzaca.org.nz

The New Zealand Aged Care Association (NZACA) is a not-for-profit, national membership organisation representing approximately 93%, or more than 37,000 beds, from New Zealand’s aged residential care sector. The services our members provide include rest home, hospital, dementia, and psychogeriatric care, as well as short-term care