



Transition of COVID-19 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) and Antiviral Medications for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services – March 2024

Background

From 2022, the Australian Government has provided a range of targeted support to Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS) impacted by COVID-19 through the National Medical Stockpile (NMS). This includes:

- PPE when commercial supplies were unavailable or insufficient.
- RAT kits for surveillance screening of staff and visitors.
- COVID-19 oral antiviral treatments.

The Government is no longer able to supply COVID-related medical supplies to ACCHS and encourages services to plan for this in their business-as-usual activities.

Why?

- The NMS is a strategic reserve of drugs, vaccines, antidotes, and personal protective equipment available for use as part of the response to public health emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
- On 20 October 2023, Australia's Chief Medical Officer declared that COVID-19 is no longer a Communicable Disease Incident of National Significance following the end of winter in Australia.
- As the emergency phase of the Pandemic is behind us, over the past 12 months, the Australian Government has been transitioning from pandemic arrangements and supporting ACCHS to access stock through regular or standard channels, such as a wholesale provider or a pharmacy.

Further information to support the transition

1. PPE and RATs

From 1 May 2024 PPE and RATs will no longer be available through the NMS.

PPE and RATs will need to be sourced through existing medical (commercial) channels. This may be through a wholesale provider or a pharmacy. These channels are where ACCHS would normally order their medical supplies in their regions.

The NMS are establishing a panel arrangement for future PPE purchases should this be required. Once established, a list of approved suppliers to the panel will be available on the Department of Health and Aged Care (the Department) website. Organisations may contact suppliers on the list to purchase products outside of the panel arrangement if required. We expect to have these panel arrangements finalised by end March/early April 2024.

2. COVID-19 Antiviral Medications

From 1 March 2024, COVID-19 antivirals will no longer be available through the NMS.

There are currently two COVID-19 oral antiviral treatments, nirmatrelvir and ritonavir (Paxlovid®) and molnupiravir (Lagevrio®), listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) for the treatment of COVID-19. Eligible patients can access antivirals through a community pharmacy with a prescription from a medical practitioner or nurse practitioner.

Under the current eligibility criteria patients may be eligible for subsidised supply of antivirals if they test positive for COVID-19 and are at increased risk of developing severe COVID-19. This currently includes people:

- 70 years of age or older, regardless of risk factors and with or without symptoms.
- 50 years of age or older with additional risk factor/s for developing severe disease.
- First Nations people, 30 years of age or older and with one additional risk factor for developing severe disease.
- 18 years of age or older, with moderate to severe immunocompromise; or have been previously hospitalised with COVID-19 and are subsequently re-infected.

More information on the eligibility criteria and risk factors is available on the [Department's website](#).

[How can First Nations Patients access COVID-19 oral antiviral treatments, nirmatrelvir and ritonavir \(Paxlovid®\) and molnupiravir \(Lagevrio®\)](#)

First Nations patients can access Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) general schedule medicines including treatments for COVID-19 via the Closing the Gap (CTG) PBS co-payment Program or the Remote Area Aboriginal Health Services (RAAHS) Program.

1. The [CTG Co-payment program](#) improves access to affordable [General Schedule PBS medicines](#) supplied by Community Pharmacies or Section 94 Approved Private Hospital Pharmacies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
 - For more information for patients, including eligibility, please visit the [PBS website](#).
 - For information for [prescribers](#) and [pharmacists](#), including registration and dispensing CTG prescriptions, please visit the [Services Australia website](#).
2. The Remote Area Aboriginal Health Services (RAAHS) Program recognises that there may not be pharmacies available to dispense medications in some remote areas and allows clients of approved RAAHS to receive General Schedule medicines without charge, without the need for a normal PBS prescription form.
 - More information for Aboriginal Health Services, including eligibility and the [RAAHS programs application](#) form is available on the [Department of Health's webpage](#).
 - For information for service providers and Aboriginal Health Services, including the [claim form](#) and processes, please visit the [Services Australia webpage](#).

Government's Community Service Obligation Funding Pool

The Government ensures all PBS-listed medicines can be supplied quickly to patients, via the Community Service Obligation (CSO) arrangement, with pharmaceutical wholesalers delivering the full range of PBS medicines and National Diabetes Services Scheme products, to patients via their community pharmacy, regardless of where they live and for most items within 24 hours.

Both Lagevrio and Paxlovid must be supplied by CSO Distributors to community pharmacies within 24 hours of order cut-off times, including for distribution to rural and remote locations.

Please contact pbs@health.gov.au if you have any queries.

Prescriber Bag Supplies

The Prescriber Bag Supplies allows for medical practitioners and nurse practitioners to hold certain medicines to supply them free to patients for emergency.

Medical practitioners and nurse practitioners can order up to two bottles of Lagevrio and two cartons of Paxlovid from a community pharmacy for their Prescriber Bag. Prescribers may order the maximum quantity of each medicine, provided they do not already have the maximum quantity on hand, once a month.

A complete list of current prescriber bag medicines is available at: [Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme \(PBS\) | Prescriber Bag Supplies](#). Eligible prescribers can order a Prescriber Bag Supply Order Book by completing a request form available from [Services Australia](#).

Other COVID-19 transitional support

National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)

NACCHO are providing short-term support to ACCHS under current COVID-19 grant agreements. This may include funding to engage surge workforce and support infection control activities including PPE which are eligible transitional planning, outbreak and/or vaccination activities. **Please note that this funding is non-ongoing and ends 30 June 2024.**

Please contact NACCHO at covid19vaccine@naccho.org.au to discuss your COVID-19 support needs.