



COVID-19 Pharmacy Response Review – North Queensland

March 2020-June 2022

FOR INFORMATION ONLY - NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Introduction – and thank you

Since March 2020, pharmacies have helped underpin Australia's response to COVID-19.

At Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN), we have been privileged to collaborate with the pharmacy sector during the COVID-19 pandemic response.

This review is an opportunity for NQPHN to recognise pharmacists and their staff for the dedication and hard work they have provided to help northern Queenslanders stay safe and live happier, healthier, longer lives during the pandemic.

Pharmacies across our region have stepped up to help protect our communities, including changing their work practices, managing multiple communications, and adapting business models to include COVID vaccinations, as well as collaborating with other primary care professionals.

On behalf of NQPHN, thank you.



Robin Whyte
Chief Executive Officer
Northern Queensland Primary Health Network



NQPHN acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First Nation Peoples and the Traditional Custodians of this land. We respect their continued connection to land and sea, country, kin, and community. We also pay our respect to their Elders past, present, and emerging as the custodians of knowledge and lore.

North Queensland Pharmacy COVID-19 Response Highlights

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, pharmacies rapidly, and extensively changed service and care delivery to ensure the wellbeing of patients, while also experiencing an increase in activity.

Pharmacy quickly adopted new models of service delivery to ensure continuity of care during the COVID response. This included:

- » Screening of patients at entry to stores.
- » Installation of personal screens.
- » Routine use of Protective Personal Equipment (PPE).
- » Implementing strategies to manage increase workloads for staff.
- » Planning for home delivery options for medication.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The demand for and access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) became a significant issue during the COVID-19 pandemic response, locally, nationally, and internationally. Pharmacies and other primary care providers needed to rapidly incorporate the use of PPE into all levels of their service delivery, from frontline reception to GP consultation.

To support the change in service delivery and the significant role they played in protecting the health of our communities, pharmacies utilised the PPE available through the National Medical Stockpile.



NQPHN region

Total PPE items distributed from National Medical Stockpile: 547,367

» Personal protective equipment (PPE) distributed and utilised by general practices, GPRCs, ACCHOs, and pharmacy staff.



*Data correct as of 30 June 2022
Data source: NQPHN PPE collection, 2022

COVID-19 Vaccination Roll Out

Operation COVID Shield was the Australian Government Department of Health's national program to ensure as many Australians were vaccinated against COVID-19 as early as possible.

To deliver the most efficient and effective distribution and delivery of the vaccine, pharmacies (along with general practices and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs)), were tasked with the frontline primary care delivery of a safe and efficient vaccine rollout.

As of 30 June 2022, there were a total of 112 pharmacies, 136 general practices, 11 ACCHOs, and 3 GP Respiratory Clinics in North Queensland administering the COVID-19 vaccine.

Across the NQPHN region, pharmacies, GPs, ACCHOs, and GP Respiratory Clinics administered more than 777,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines from February 2021 to June 2022 – an incredible achievement to protect the health and wellbeing of all North Queenslanders.

NQPHN region

» [Number of vaccines administered](#)



777,492

Vaccinations administered by general practices, General Practice Respiratory Clinics, pharmacies, and Aboriginal Medical Services.

*Data correct as of 30 June 2022
Data source: CVAX-19 Statistics and Progress, Queensland Health, 2022

Training and education

To ensure that pharmacy teams could meet the increasing demands of responding to COVID-19, pharmacies extended their hours of service, collaborated with the broader healthcare sector, and embraced the training and education opportunities available during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure they provided the best possible health care to their patients.

For example, in a Cairns region initiative, pharmacists across the region helped administer 1,335 COVID vaccine doses to 680 Catholic and Independent schoolchildren in 13 schools to assist the Australian Government and Queensland Government in protecting these younger people – a first in Australia.

Pharmacies in Townsville and Mackay also supported the vaccination of residents in Residential Aged Care Facilities (RACFs), including attending aged care facilities.



This often-included collaboration consultation and training events after full pharmacy work days.

Other pharmacy training and education activities included:

- » Infection control updates.
- » Frontline staff capacity building.

Engagement and collaboration

To ensure a comprehensive response to COVID-19, pharmacies were required to engage in a range of meetings, consultation, and collaborative projects. These included but were not limited to:

- » Localised cross jurisdictional planning to support whole of system vaccination rollout.
- » Participation in development of Community Care Pathways – Living with COVID.

Pharmacies also played an important role throughout the response phase of the COVID-19 pandemic by reviewing, collating, and actioning extensive communication of key messages sent out by government and non-government organisations. The emerging COVID-19 pandemic often required fast-paced pivots from the pharmacy sector to ensure rapid responses to government and key health agency advice. Pharmacies were tasked with ensuring the community received the correct advice, support, and guidance. Pharmacies led the way in responding to the needs of the community and representing these needs to State and Federal peak bodies.

Pharmacy and primary care post COVID-19

Pharmacies and primary care will continue to be at the forefront of helping patients cope with the ongoing legacy left by COVID-19. Pharmacies and primary care will be expected to provide high-quality primary care in a system affected by workforce shortages, funding restraints, and continued pandemic peaks and troughs. NQPHN recognises that primary care providers need to be appropriately supported.

Final word

This document is just a snapshot of the vital role pharmacies have played in keeping North Queensland communities healthy during the COVID-19 response. Pharmacies are at the core of our health system, and during the COVID-19 response, they have had to adapt to new ways of caring for patients, such as the participation in the COVID vaccination rollout program and the expanded use of PPE, while still responding to an increase in business-as-usual services.

The way that pharmacy has stepped up during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates just how important their role is in protecting the health of our communities. The vaccination rollout is an example of this, which has been a massive undertaking where pharmacies have been essential to its success.

As a result, NQPHN is developing a Build Back Better Initiative which over the coming years will provide primary care with opportunities to gain skills to support their teams through future challenges.

Vaccine Works campaign

NQPHN's original Vaccine Works campaign spotlights the region's vaccinating general practices and pharmacies and focuses on the primary care sector's highly-successful role in increasing COVID-19 vaccination rates in North Queensland.

Pharmacies feature strongly in the campaign, highlighting the incredible work pharmacies are doing to help protect North Queenslanders during the ongoing pandemic.

Scan the QR code below to access the Vaccine Works stories, or [click here](#) to find out more.



Pharmacies play a vital role in saving lives and protecting the health of our communities, and NQPHN would like to thank them for everything they have done during the pandemic.

We look forward to continuing to work with pharmacies to help northern Queenslanders live happier, healthier, longer lives.

Appendix

Stories from the front line

LiveLife Pharmacy Cannonvale helping to protect Whitsunday community through COVID vaccinations

LiveLife Pharmacy Cannonvale has administered more than 11,000 COVID-19 vaccinations to the public as Northern Queensland PHN highlights the incredible work pharmacies are doing to help protect local communities during the ongoing pandemic.

Across Australia, pharmacists have played a key role in ensuring high vaccination rates to help stop the spread of COVID-19, including in northern Queensland where 112 pharmacies participated in the COVID-19 vaccination program.

LiveLife Pharmacy Cannonvale owner Lee McLennan said the pharmacy had been well equipped and able to respond to the rapid need for vaccinations to be administered to the local Whitsunday community. "I am so proud of our team of pharmacists and our participation in the COVID-19 vaccination roll out," said Lee.

"With two consulting rooms available and our pharmacists available seven days per week, the wait times for administration were very minimal for our patients.

"All of our pharmacists completed the COVID-19 vaccination training provided by the government, and we managed to administer a mixture of vaccinations including AstraZeneca, Moderna and Pfizer vaccinations to patients aged from five years to adults."

In particular, LiveLife Pharmacy Cannonvale encouraged supported patient safety and uptake of the vaccine service through:

- » sufficient seating in clear vision of pharmacists on duty, with social distancing encouraged
- » masks provided to all patients as required

- » infrared temperature checks and patient questionnaires regarding their medical history prior to vaccination
- » hand sanitiser stations at each communication point in the pharmacy
- » patients given written consumer vaccine information and verbal advice after their vaccination
- » encouraging patients to self-book appointments on their devices to streamline and also reduce unnecessary contact time
- » making appointments available all day, seven days a week - reducing restriction of services to allow as many people as possible to access vaccination in a timely manner.

Lee said he is encouraged that pharmacy is forever changing and adapting to the health needs of all Australians.

"Pharmacists are now being given more scope of practice, which means that there are always opportunities for continued learning," he said.

"We are so pleased that we were selected to participate in the vaccination rollout and are excited for what other initiatives may present in the future where pharmacy is able to assist.

"We look forward to continuing to work with our local GPs to ease the workload burden for common health conditions."



Redlynch pharmacy delivers more than 10,000 COVID-19 vaccinations to local community

TerryWhite Chemmart Redlynch has administered more than 10,000 COVID-19 vaccinations to the public as Northern Queensland PHN highlights the incredible work pharmacies are doing to help protect local communities during the ongoing pandemic.

The pharmacy, located in the busy shopping centre in the Cairns suburb of Redlynch, has ensured availability of the full range of COVID vaccines, including those for children. Across Australia, pharmacies have played a key role in ensuring high vaccination rates to help stop the spread of COVID-19, including in northern Queensland where 112 pharmacies participated in the COVID-19 vaccination program.

Pharmacist Simon Djurdjevic said TerryWhite Chemmart Redlynch understood the demand for services in its local area and responded with a coordinated response to the pandemic.

“We recognised the demand on health services locally and adapted to offer an accessible, convenient vaccine service for the Cairns and Tablelands region,” he said. “Our vaccination service has enabled the community to access COVID vaccines during peak periods of demand to ensure more people were able to get vaccinated during outbreaks.

“Importantly, the service has reduced burden on local health services offering the vaccine, including the Convention Centre, Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service, and GP services locally.”

Simon believes the success of TerryWhite Chemmart Redlynch’s vaccine service was in part due to identifying suitable staff, training staff in data entry, and ensuring all staff were equipped to answer patient questions about the vaccines to reduce vaccine hesitancy.

“We were able to ensure we had adequate clinic materials and ordered vaccines in advance,” she said. “In addition, we were flexible with bookings to offer the service seven days a week, including public holidays and weekends. This enabled people to access the service at more convenient times.

“Importantly, we also offered walk-in vaccines to ensure people were not turned away, which took advantage of opportunistic contacts with patients that were needing a vaccine.”

Simon said many patients were extremely grateful for the availability and ease of access of the service, given wait times or lack of availability of the vaccine elsewhere. “The flexibility of bookings, and accessibility and convenience of our pharmacy’s service enabled many of our local business, schools, and nursing homes to get their staff vaccinated during peak periods of demand,” he said.

TerryWhite Chemmart Redlynch ensured its staff remained healthy and at work to continue to deliver the service, which at peak periods exceeded 200 vaccines a day.

“Given the volume of patients accessing our service, we had a number of measures to ensure safety, including ensuring that our staff were vaccinated against COVID,” Simon said.

“Our clinic both screened patients and maintained a steady flow of patients with a separate entry and exit that avoided crowding, and ensured staff and vulnerable patients remained safe.

“PPE, hand hygiene practices and social distancing were all utilised by staff to minimise the spread of the virus.” With the pandemic far from over and cases of COVID still occurring in northern Queensland, Simon reiterated the key role pharmacies continue to play in protecting the health of the community.

“Many people are yet to receive their third or fourth dose of the COVID vaccine and their immunity may be significantly reduced if months have elapsed since a previous dose,” he said.

“We would encourage people to access a professional vaccine service available from trained staff at many pharmacies in Cairns.

“Pharmacies are well placed to deliver professional vaccine services and have gained extensive experience throughout the course of the pandemic.”



Townsville pharmacy collaborates to ensure local community is protected from COVID-19 virus

Priceline Pharmacy Aitkenvale has shown the value of collaboration as Northern Queensland PHN highlights the key role pharmacists have played to protect the local community during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The pharmacy, based at Stockland Townsville Shopping Centre, has been busily administering vaccinations for the past two years.

A Commonwealth vaccination clinic also recently commenced operation in the shopping centre, and Priceline Pharmacy Aitkenvale has now been able to refer people to the clinic to reduce waiting times and ease pressure during busy periods at the pharmacy.

Priceline Pharmacy Aitkenvale pharmacist Francesca Crouch said she has been referring her customers to the Commonwealth clinic for Pfizer vaccinations, with her own pharmacy continuing to vaccinate with Moderna two days a week.

“Now that the majority of the population have been double vaccinated, we have had a reduction of vaccination enquires,” she said.

“To reduce vaccine wastage and improve workflow, we have since reduced our vaccination days to Thursdays and Fridays.

“During the peak of COVID Vaccinating, we were offering AstraZeneca, Moderna and Pfizer and doing a combination of appointments and walk-ins.

“Most of our patients were favouring the Moderna vaccine – and to reduce vaccine wastage and the ease of inventory management, we decided to only keep the Moderna brand.

“We now recommend customers to go the Commonwealth clinic if they require the Pfizer brand or if it’s on a day where we can’t fit them in. It’s proximity and availability are very convenient.

“It’s been really great to be able to have that service just outside when we reach capacity or have stock issues. “We’ve had patients who return to our store after their vaccinations to thank us for our referral because it’s such as quick and easy service.

“I think it’s really important to collaborate as much as possible, especially during the busier times.

“COVID has played a toll on the workload of all healthcare professionals and it’s great that we can all help as a team and reduce the burden.

“I think a collaborative approach such as the one we’ve implemented at Stockland Townsville is a future model which could be very successful.”

Francesca believes the role of pharmacy to increase COVID vaccination rates throughout the region has been critical.

“I do think pharmacy has played a huge role,” she said. “The (Pharmacy) Guild released a recent statement on local community pharmacists have administered over 8 million COVID-19 vaccine doses.

“It has definitely created a lot of public awareness as to what services are available at pharmacies.

“I see our role as trying to help lessen the burden of the hospitals and GPs, and being there for everyday healthcare needs.

“I feel we have raised a lot of awareness on the importance of herd immunity.

“We have great rapport with our customers and many have praised us for the ease of obtaining a vaccine. “I feel we have broken the stigma behind obtaining a vaccine for many, with many customers who were previously afraid of vaccinations making statements such as it being ‘non-painful’, ‘easy and convenient’, and ‘not as bad as I thought it would be’.

“I hope that our collaborative approach has helped the general population understand the importance of herd immunity with not only COVID-19, but other infectious diseases.”



Pharmacy playing key role in school COVID vaccination rollout

Northern Queensland PHN has highlighted the key role pharmacists have played to protect school-aged children in the Cairns region during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Across Australia, pharmacists have played a key role in ensuring high vaccination rates to help stop the spread of COVID-19, including in northern Queensland where 112 pharmacies participated in the COVID-19 vaccination program.

In Cairns, nine Alive pharmacists across the region helped administer 1,335 COVID vaccine doses to 680 Catholic and Independent schoolchildren in 13 schools to assist the Australian Government and Queensland Government in protecting these younger people – a first in Australia.

Alive Pharmacy Chief Pharmacist Georgina Twomey said the vaccination of young children through pharmacies is a success story of the pandemic.

“A call out was sent to all pharmacies in the district to ask us if we could pitch in,” she said.

“We were already under the pump, with a lot of sickness with our staff and our teams quite constrained, but we managed to pull enough personnel together to go to the high schools.

“We put together a roster where people shared the load and we coordinated with the schools to then go to them locally, set up an area and vaccinate everyone.

“I think it made it a lot easier for parents to be able to have their kids vaccinated at school, and it was something we were able to stand up quite quickly, and get done in a timely manner.

“I think it’s a real success story, and nothing else happened like it in any other areas of Australia.”

Georgina said pharmacy worked closely with the schools to make sure they had the legislation right to be able to vaccinate at each site.

“We had to make sure that we had stock of Moderna, and we had to make sure we were adhering to cold chain in a school environment,” she said.

“We don’t normally vaccinate in schools, so we had to work through the processes and overcome any challenges to ensure its success.”

Georgina believes the success of the school vaccination program has further informed the public as to the wider primary care services provided by pharmacies.

“I think that without pharmacy’s involvement, we would not have been able to vaccinate the public at the rates we’ve seen,” she said.

“There is an awareness now that pharmacies can offer things like vaccinations and other services that possibly weren’t known by the community beforehand.”



Pharmacies across NQ receive 15,000+ items of PPE

Published 21 February 2022

More than 15,000 items of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) have been distributed over the past week to pharmacies across North Queensland to help protect pharmacy vaccinators and the wider community during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The Australian Government Department of Health recently tasked Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN) to distribute PPE from the National Medical Stockpile (NMS) to vaccinating pharmacies as part of the Government's \$180 million Living with COVID-19 Primary Care Package.

After receiving the supply from the Australian Government last week, NQPHN has now couriered PPE to 75 local pharmacies which had previously submitted an order, including P2/N95 masks.

"After being informed of the imminent arrival of the PPE for pharmacies, we quickly assembled a team which assisted in taking delivery, opening, sorting, repacking and organising couriers for these items for pharmacy vaccinators across North Queensland," said NQPHN Chief Executive Officer Ms Robin Whyte.

"It was a significant logistical task, and our team did an amazing job to ensure all PPE orders were dispatched within just a few days.

"Pharmacy plays a vital role in boosting community vaccination rates: - helping to save lives and protect the health of our communities. PPE is a crucial support for vaccinating pharmacists."

"I would like to thank everyone in the primary care sector for continuing to work together with NQPHN and the broader health care sector to protect our community here in North Queensland."



Media coverage

NQ Primary Health Network supports Cairns healthcare providers with essentials donation

MORE than 100,000 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) items have been distributed over the past week to primary healthcare providers across the Cairns region to help protect healthcare workers and the wider community during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The Australian Government Department of Health recently tasked Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN) to distribute PPE from the National Medical Stockpile (NMS) as part of the Government's \$180 million Living with COVID-19 Primary Care Package.

NQPHN has now couriered PPE to 36 local general practices, GP Respiratory Clinics and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), treating COVID positive patients.

NQPHN Chief Executive Officer Robin Whyte said it was important that health-

care professionals access the critical PPE supplies required to continue safely consulting with their patients during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

"The safety of our healthcare workers and the communities to which they provide health services is of paramount importance during a pandemic like COVID-19," Ms Whyte said.

"After being informed of the PPE being made available, we quickly assembled a team which assisted in taking delivery, opening, sorting, repacking and organising couriers for these items for primary healthcare providers across North Queensland.

"It was a significant logistical task, and our team did a fantastic job to ensure all PPE orders were fulfilled within just a few days.

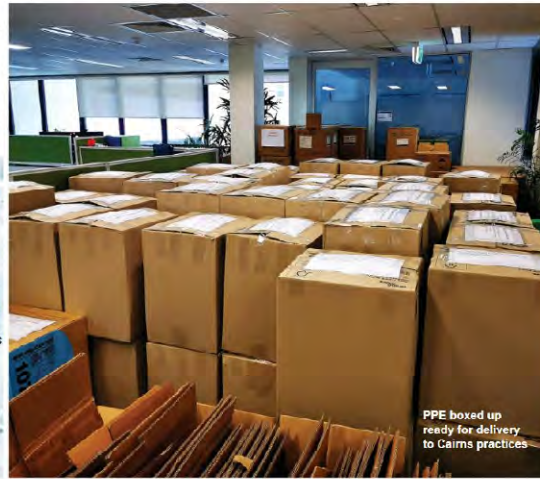
"I would like to thank everyone in the primary care sector for confirming to work together with NQPHN and the

broader health care sector to protect our community here in North Queensland.

"Primary care plays a vital role in saving lives and protecting the health of our communities, and PPE plays a crucial role in achieving that," she said.

TO DATE, NQPHN HAS DISTRIBUTED THE FOLLOWING ACROSS CAIRNS:

- 27,000 surgical face masks
- 27,000 gloves
- 24,300 P2/N95 face masks
- 10,800 surgical gowns
- 10,790 eye goggles
- 540 hand sanitisers
- 180 pulse oximeters
- 10 face shields.



JAB HEROES SHINE IN NEW CAMPAIGN

VACCINE providers in the Innisfail region are being showcased in a new campaign that highlights what primary care providers are doing to help during the ongoing pandemic.

Northern Queensland Primary Health Network's Vaccine Works campaign spotlights the region's general practices and pharmacies, and focuses on their role in increasing Covid-19 vaccination rates in North Queensland.

In Innisfail, vaccinating clinics had (as of November 2) collectively delivered more than 12,000 doses.

Chemist Warehouse Innisfail managing partner and pharmacist Joel Ng said it had been great to see pharmacies able to administer Covid-19 vaccines to the community.

"The uptake of the vaccine has been very positive from the Innisfail community. We were fully booked on our vaccination days and had to increase the booking slot in order to accommodate for the demand," Mr Ng said.

NQPHN chief executive officer Robin Whyte praised Innisfail's vaccinating GPs and pharmacies and said the primary care sector was playing a key role.



Chemist Warehouse pharmacist Joyce Lo vaccinates Ashlea Welch at the Innisfail site.

