

COVID-19 Residential Aged Care Facilities (RACFs) Response Review

March 2020-December 2022



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.





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NQPHN COVID-19 Residential Aged Care Facilities (RACFs) vaccination rollout in North Queensland – a snapshot

RACF residents and staff vaccination rollout (NQPHN region)

March 2022 – December 2022



NQPHN collaborated in ensuring the facilitation of more than
100 vaccination clinics



NQPHN engaged with
66 aged care facilities
on **418 separate occasions**
to ensure successful rollout of clinics

*Data correct as of 31 December 2022

May 2021 – March 2022



4,399
Residents in 65 facilities



210
Visits facilitated by NQPHN

*Data correct as of 31 March 2022

Introduction – and thank you

Since March 2020, residential aged care facility (RACF) staff have helped underpin Australia's response to COVID-19.

At Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN), we have been privileged to collaborate with Residential Aged Care Facility (RACF) staff during the COVID-19 pandemic response.

Residents of RACFs are at increased risk of COVID-19 infection and are more vulnerable to serious complications if they do become infected.

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

RACFs across our region have stepped up to help protect our communities, including hosting mass vaccination events, adapting business models to include COVID-19 vaccinations and testing, changing their work practices, and managing multiple communications, 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



North Queensland RACF COVID-19 response highlights

Mass vaccination centres

RACF staff supported and encouraged all residents and eligible workers to receive their COVID-19 vaccine doses as soon as they were eligible.

RACF staff were responsible for hosting COVID-19 vaccination clinics on site and supporting residents and eligible workers to access COVID-19 vaccines safely and effectively.

Key responsibilities included:

- liaising with primary care providers and NQPHN to secure local access to deliver in-reach vaccine services as a first option
- supporting residents and their family, carers and loved ones, and residential aged care workers to access trusted information on the winter dose and clinic
- managing consent processes for residents
- planning with vaccine providers for a clinic, including:
 - setting a clinic date
 - determining how the site should be configured to support the safe and efficient operation of the clinic on the day, and compliance with Pfizer site readiness requirements
- preparing the facility for the clinic, including:
 - the physical environment
 - residents
 - staff, and

- family, health professionals and other support people
- accepting a vaccine delivery to the RACF, completing necessary paperwork, and storing the vaccines in accordance with the information and instructions provided.
- preparing residents for the clinic, including assessing their clinical suitability for a vaccine on the day, and post-clinic monitoring and reporting any adverse events
- reporting resident and worker vaccinations through My Aged Care.

Other highlights

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, RACF staff changed service and care delivery to ensure the wellbeing of their residents.

Other activities included:

- More than **2,400** aged care residents and staff received COVID-19 vaccines following two Far North Queensland vaccination blitzes in May and June 2021.
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC), the key medical decision-making committee for health emergencies, advised that all residential aged care staff and visiting workers should be vaccinated for influenza by 1 May 2020. To fulfil this requirement, RACF staff worked with NQPHN to ensure the administration of flu vaccinations to **440** staff across the region.
- To ensure that RACF staff could meet the increasing demands of responding to COVID-19, RACFs 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 residents. This included infection control and mask fit testing training.
- In May 2020, RACF staff worked with NQPHN to coordinate the delivery of **six** separate forums to more than **270** RACF staff, in-home care, and disability service representatives. These forums provided an update on the COVID-19 response efforts, as well as guest presentations from the Department of Health, Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), and Queensland Government Public Health officials (Tropical Public Health Services). These forums were a conduit for aged and community care providers to both hear directly from and to provide feedback to the specific departments.

As we transition out of the declared COVID-19 pandemic, RACF staff continue to update and modify their daily care for residents including, but not limited to:

- continuing to support COVID-19 surveillance testing at their facilities to protect residents through the screening of visitors and staff via Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs).

RACF staff have established processes to adjust staff rosters to minimise risk to residents and/or exposure of other staff (e.g. exposed workers tending to COVID-19 cases).

RACF staff continue to undertake ongoing reviews and implement processes for reviewing residents' vaccination status, and identify and recall their residents for COVID-19 vaccination. The facilities collaborate with general practices, pharmacies and Primary Health Networks (PHNs) to ensure residents receive booster vaccinations when due.



Loreto Home for the Aged, Townsville





Warrina Innisfail Aged Care Facility

Final word

This document is just a snapshot of the vital role RACF staff have played in keeping North Queensland communities healthy during the COVID-19 response.

The way that RACF staff have responded during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates just how important their role is in protecting the health of our older community members.

One example of this is the COVID-19 vaccination program rollout, which was a massive undertaking by RACF staff across our region, to help vaccinate their staff and residents. RACF staff were essential to the program's overall success, and this remains equally so with booster COVID-19 vaccinations.

RACF staff play a vital role in protecting the health of our older residents, and NQPHN would like to thank them for everything they have done during the pandemic.

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

Appendix

RACF stories from the front line

Aged care COVID-19 vaccine blitz credited with protecting vulnerable people over Christmas

December 2022

A COVID-19 vaccination blitz delivered at aged care facilities across North Queensland before Christmas has been credited with protecting vulnerable people over the festive period.

Supported by Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN) and the Australian Government, an in-reach vaccination team from Oceana Health administered 255 vaccinations to residents and staff at 16 local facilities by early December 2022.

[Latest Australian Government statistics](#) show there was a significant increase in COVID-19 outbreaks in North Queensland aged care facilities over Christmas, from just two facilities in November rising to 30 facilities by the end of December.

And with 12 of the 16 facilities visited as part of the blitz reporting COVID outbreaks by 31 December 2022, the vaccination blitz has now been credited as keeping residents safe during the pandemic.

“Elderly residents are at a much higher risk of complications of COVID-19, and vaccination against COVID-19 reduces the spread and severity of disease for these vulnerable members of the community,” said Oceana Health’s Andrew Prince.

“We’ve been delighted to work closely with NQPHN to help vaccinate the local population, and we feel our pre-Christmas vaccination clinics have genuinely saved lives in protecting aged care residents during the festive period and beyond.”

A notable success took place in the Whitsunday coastal town of Bowen, where a significant number of vaccinations were administered to aged care residents amid ongoing health workforce challenges in the region.

Bowen aged care facility Murroona Gardens Executive Support Manager Sally Vico said her staff work very hard to keep their residents safe in the COVID-19 environment.

“Our residents know that vaccination is the best protection, and we know that vaccination against COVID has contributed to positive outcomes for our residents in an outbreak situation,” she said.

“We have had assistance from NQPHN and our local pharmacy in ensuring residents receive each vaccine in a timely manner.

“When it was time for our residents’ ‘winter booster’, we were grateful that the PHN could come to our assistance.

“Our residents were all happy to attend the PHN COVID-19 Winter Dose Vaccination Clinic.”

NQPHN Chief Executive Officer Robin Whyte said the vaccination blitz for aged care residents and workers in North Queensland was an important step in protecting older Australians.

“Aged care residents, especially First Nations peoples, are among the most vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19, and we need to protect them to the best of our ability throughout this pandemic,” Ms Whyte said.

“I’d like to thank everyone involved in the rollout of vaccinations prior to Christmas, including the vaccine providers and aged care residents and staff who helped contribute to protecting themselves and their community.”



Photos: Murroona Gardens aged care facility, Bowen



Townsville pharmacy helps protect aged care residents during COVID-19 pandemic

November 2022

Cate's Chemist has been at the forefront of aged care vaccination in the Townsville region, delivering between 30 and 60 COVID vaccinations a day at their peak.

Cate's Chemist Hyde Park Pharmacy Manager Eliese Lloyd said her pharmacy was passionate about helping some of the region's most vulnerable community members.

"When it was announced that we could provide COVID vaccination services off site and that aged care residents were a priority group, we reached out to help," she said.

"We actually look after a couple of nursing homes as well, so we understand how vulnerable the facilities are and how hard it is for them.

"So, when we were told we could help with the vaccine rollout, we also called in our students to help the pharmacists that went out to do the vaccinations, so it was a great team effort."

Eliese said the COVID vaccination rollout in residential aged care facilities presented new challenges to overcome.

"We had to do things differently, and we did have many challenges to start with, especially with coordinating staff," she said.

"We were also very busy in the pharmacy, and we had to make sure we were able to free people up to visit the aged care facilities while still running our normal service, so that was challenging.

"Then we had to get the cold chain logistics sorted, making sure everything was done properly, reading through all the guidelines and making sure we followed them all.

"The setting out of everything was probably the longest part of working off site."

Eliese said the rewards of taking part in the aged care vaccination rollout were great, despite the early challenges of ensuring a smooth, safe and successful vaccination of residents.

"The major benefit, of course, is the relationship that you get with the nursing home and knowing that you've helped them and their residents, and obviously it didn't cost them anything, which was the best part," she said.

"The residents were really appreciative. A nurse would come around with us and introduce us to the patients, and they were just so thankful that we could get it done for them.

"We believe that supporting the people around you is so important, and that includes everyone from babies to the elderly, so if we can help, we try our best.

"Being able to do reach out during the pandemic has made us realise how it is possible to help service our local community in new and innovative ways."



Mackay pharmacist playing key role in aged care COVID vaccination rollout

November 2022

Mackay-based community pharmacist Karalyn Huxhagen has provided approximately 150 COVID vaccinations to aged care residents during the pandemic response.

She said the legislation allowed pharmacists to provide vaccination services to residential aged care facilities (RACFs), helping to protect the health of their residents.

“Pharmacists played a key role when aged care facilities needed to have catch-up vaccinations for residents who were either new, or had not been vaccinated,” Karalyn said.

“Pharmacy was asked if they would be willing to participate in that, and I immediately put my hand up to do it on my days off.

“I’ve always worked in aged care in the region, and I’ve been a pharmacist for most of the facilities in this region since the 1980s, so the residents are virtually family to me.

“So, it’s more of a philanthropic activity for me, and about my desire to help my local community.”

Karalyn, who has collaborated with Mackay Hospital and Health Service and participated in the development of Community Care Pathways during the COVID pandemic response, has delivered vaccinations in both rural community and RACF settings.

She said the use of local pharmacists to support RACFs has been a major success.

“For me, the COVID vaccination rollout was always about needing to look locally to support locally to reach locally, and we stood up as pharmacists and have shown what can be achieved,” she said.

“We really saw the benefit of using local pharmacists and primary care providers for the benefit of local people.

“We’ve got to remember that RACFs have a quite a high turnover of residents, so it’s important that we continue to deliver this service.”

Karalyn said aged care facilities were very grateful for the support of pharmacists to help their most vulnerable residents.

“The reception from the RACFs and their residents has been really positive,” she said.

“Pharmacy’s role in the vaccination effort overall has been huge across our region.

“We’ve been able to immunise both the public and the aged care sector in our local area, which has been an amazing effort.

“I think it has given much more awareness of pharmacy’s ability and desire to be part of a wider primary healthcare response to the pandemic.”



Karalyn Huxhagen

Indigenous aged care residents receive COVID-19 vaccinations

September 2021

Torres Strait and Hopevale aged care residents and workers have received their COVID-19 vaccinations following another Far North Queensland vaccine rollout blitz.

Supported by Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN), an in-reach Commonwealth Government vaccination team from Healthcare Australia (HCA) visited Star of the Sea Elders Village on Thursday Island, and Hope Vale Aged Care to administer vaccines.

NQPHN Chief Executive Officer Robin Whyte said the vaccination tours for aged care residents and workers in North Queensland were an important step in protecting older Australians.

“Aged care residents, especially First Nations peoples, are among the most vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19, and we need to protect them to the best of our ability throughout this pandemic,” Ms Whyte said.

“I’d like to thank everyone involved in the rollout of vaccinations this week, including the vaccine providers and aged care residents and staff who helped contribute to protecting themselves and their community.”



Hope Vale Aged Care, Cape York Peninsula



Star of the Sea Elders Village, Thursday Island

Mackay aged care residents have now received COVID-19 vaccine

June 2021

All aged care residents in the Mackay region who chose to receive the COVID-19 vaccine have been fully vaccinated after receiving their second doses.

Supported by NQPHN, vaccination teams from in-reach Australian Government vaccination workforce providers Healthcare Australia (HCA) and Aspen Medical visited 14 residential aged care facilities in the Mackay region to administer vaccines to residents.

The Mackay region is the first in North Queensland to have fully vaccinated aged care residents, with all participating aged care residents in Townsville and Cairns expected to be fully vaccinated by the end of June.

NQPHN Chief Executive Officer Robin Whyte said the vaccination rollout for aged care residents in Mackay was another important step in protecting older Australians.

“Aged care residents are among the most vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19, and we need to protect them to the best of our ability throughout this pandemic,” Ms Whyte said.

“The vaccination rollout across the Mackay region was a significant logistical exercise, with the organisation of vaccination teams on the ground in our region, delivering COVID-19 vaccinations with return visits.

“I’d like to praise everyone involved in the success of the rollout, including the vaccine providers and aged care residents and staff who helped contribute to this fantastic achievement.”

David Mallyon-Potter, Clinical and Operational Risk Manager at Sarina Aged Residential Home, said residents and staff at his facility had rolled up their sleeves for the COVID-19 vaccine.

“The discomfort of an injection pales into insignificance when seeing the effects of the infection on TV,” said Mr Mallyon-Potter.

“We all feel safer and can maybe enjoy a few more freedoms now that we are fully vaccinated at Sarina Aged Care.”

NQPHN staff also worked closely with the Australian Government Department of Health and the COVID-19 vaccination team at Mackay Hospital and Health Service to ensure the rollout’s success.

Ms Whyte said all eligible people across Queensland will have their turn to be vaccinated in the coming months, with over 50s now able to get the COVID-19 vaccine at selected General Practices, and over 40s able to register their interest.

“The Australian Government is leading a staged, gradual rollout of the vaccine, with the most vulnerable populations being prioritised for an early vaccination,” added Ms Whyte.

To check your eligibility for a COVID-19 vaccine, visit the COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility Checker: (<https://covid-vaccine.healthdirect.gov.au/eligibility>) or if you prefer not to use the online option, you can call the National Coronavirus and COVID-19 Vaccination Helpline on 1800 020 080.



Sarina Aged Care Residential Home

More than 1,200 aged care residents and staff receive COVID-19 vaccine during FNQ blitz

June 2021

More than 1,200 aged care residents and staff have received a COVID-19 vaccine following a Far North Queensland vaccination blitz.

Supported by NQPHN, five vaccination teams from in-reach Commonwealth Government vaccination workforce Healthcare Australia (HCA) visited 19 residential aged care facilities in the Cassowary Coast, Cairns, Tablelands, and Douglas regions.

Another HCA team also administered vaccines at aged care facilities in Townsville, Ingham, Trebonne and Cardwell, with all the teams combined covering more than 1,200km on the road.

The ongoing vaccine rollout means that all participating aged care residents in Townsville and Cairns are expected to be fully vaccinated by the end of June.

NQPHN Chief Executive Officer Robin Whyte said the vaccination blitz for aged care residents in North Queensland was another important step in protecting older Australians.

“Aged care residents are among the most vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19, and we need to protect them to the best of our ability throughout this pandemic,” Ms Whyte said.

“The vaccination blitz was a significant logistical exercise, with the organisation of six vaccination teams on the ground at the same time in our region, delivering COVID-19 vaccinations over just a four-day period.

“I’d like to praise everyone involved in the success of the rollout, including the vaccine providers and aged care residents and staff who helped contribute to this fantastic achievement.”

NQPHN staff also worked closely with the Department of Health, Tropical Public Health Unit and COVID-19 vaccination teams at Townsville Hospital and Health Service (HHS) and Cairns and Hinterland HHS to ensure the rollout’s success.

“Our HCA teams were welcomed into this wonderful region, and were supported by the proactive, helpful work of NQPHN to successfully reach those vulnerable mature Australians that had not yet received their first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine,” said a HCA spokesperson.

“We look forward to returning again for second doses in Week 16 of the Federal Government’s vaccination program in Australian Residential Aged Care Facilities.”

Ms Whyte said all eligible people across Queensland will have their turn to be vaccinated in the coming months, with over 50s now able to get the COVID-19 vaccine at selected General Practices, and over 40s able to register their interest.

“The Australian Government is leading a staged, gradual roll-out of the vaccine, with the most vulnerable populations being prioritised for an early vaccination,” added Ms Whyte.

To check your eligibility for a COVID-19 vaccine, visit the COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility Checker: (<https://covid-vaccine.healthdirect.gov.au/eligibility>) or if you prefer not to use the online option, you can call the National Coronavirus and COVID-19 Vaccination Helpline on 1800 020 080.



Regis Aged Care Whitfield, Cairns

Media coverage

21 TOWNSVILLEBULLETIN.COM.AU

Aged care worker vax blitz

MORE than 800 aged care workers have received a Covid-19 vaccine this week following a North Queensland vaccination blitz.

Vaccination teams from Healthcare Australia have visited residential aged care facilities in North Queensland, with the help of the North Queensland Primary Health Network, to provide staff with their Covid-19 vaccines.

The Australian government mandated from Friday, September 17, residential aged care workers must be vaccinated against Covid-19 as a condition of their employment.

This week, 13 HCA teams consisting of 39 HCA staff and nurses visited aged care facilities in Cairns, Townsville, Ingham, Bowen, the Tablelands, Hope Vale, and in the Torres Strait.

NQPHN chief executive Robin Whyte said the vaccination blitz in the region was an important step in protecting older Australians.

"Aged care residents are among the most vulnerable to the impacts of Covid-19, and we need to protect them to the best of our ability throughout this pandemic," Ms Whyte said.

"The vaccination blitz was a significant logistical exercise."

Aged care workers receive COVID-19 vaccine during NQ blitz



[by Gavin Broomhead]

The Australian Government has mandated that residential aged care workers must be vaccinated against COVID-19 as a condition of their employment.

[Full story](#)

Vaccination blitz for aged care workers

AGED care workers collectively rolled up their sleeves last week and lined up to receive their COVID vaccinations.

The Australian Government had mandated that from September 17, residential aged care workers must be vaccinated against COVID-19 as a condition of their employment within the industry.

More than 800 aged care workers received a COVID-19 vaccine recently following a North Queensland vaccination blitz.

Vaccination teams visited residential aged care facilities across North Queensland to provide staff with their COVID-19 vaccines.

Facilities across the north were visited in the vaccination blitz, including facilities in Cairns, Townsville, Ingham, Bowen, the Tablelands, Hopevale, and in the Torres Strait.

NQPHN Chief Executive

Officer Robin Whyte said the vaccination blitz for aged care workers in North Queensland was another important step in protecting older Australians.

"Aged care residents are among the most vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19, and we need to protect them to the best of our ability throughout this pandemic," Ms Whyte said.

Ms Whyte said all people aged 12 and above are now able to get a COVID-19 vaccine at general practices, pharmacies, GP-led respiratory clinics, and Queensland Health vaccination hubs.

To check how to book your COVID-19 vaccine, visit the COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility Checker: <https://covid-vaccine.healthdirect.gov.au/eligibility> or if you prefer not to use the online option, you can call the National Coronavirus and COVID-19 Vaccination Helpline on 1800 020 080.



Star of the Sea Aged care workers part of North Queensland vaccination blitz



Star of the Sea aged care worker Charles (middle) with Erica (left) and Tracy from Healthcare Australia during the COVID-19 vaccination visit to the Thursday Island aged care facility this week.

The Australian Government has mandated that residential aged care workers must be vaccinated against COVID-19 as a condition of their employment and to that end, more than 800 aged care workers have received a COVID-19 vaccine this week, including here on TI.

Supported by Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN), vaccination teams from in-reach Commonwealth Government vaccination workforce Healthcare Australia (HCA) visited residential aged care facilities across North Queensland to provide staff with their COVID-19 vaccines.

NQPHN Chief Executive Officer Robin Whyte said the vaccination blitz for aged care workers in North Queensland was an important step in protecting older Australians.

"Aged care residents are among the most vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19, and we need to protect them to the best of our ability throughout this pandemic," Ms Whyte said.

NQPHN staff also worked closely with the Department of Health, and local Hospital and Health Services to ensure the rollout's success.

Ms Whyte said all people aged 12 and above were able to get a COVID-19 vaccine at general practices, pharmacies, GP-led respiratory clinics, and Queensland Health vaccination hubs.

To check how to book your COVID-19 vaccine, visit the COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility Checker at <http://covid-vaccine.healthdirect.gov.au/eligibility> or if you prefer not to use the online option, you can call the National Coronavirus and COVID-19 Vaccination Helpline on 1800 020 080.

