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industrial relations : human resources : employment matters : training

CIRCULAR: GEN/149/NAT/149/21
DATE: 29 June 2021
SUBJECT: Aged care worker vaccines
ATTENTION: Chief Executive Officer

After an emergency national cabinet meeting last night, all residential aged care workers will be required to have at least their first COVID vaccination by mid-September.

Funding of \$11 million will be provided to cover payments to workers for time spent being vaccinated and recovering from side effects.

Mandatory vaccination

The mandate has not yet come into effect, and Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced that a 'further risk and benefit assessment' will be conducted and reported back to National Cabinet by early August.

It is intended that COVID vaccination will be a condition of working in any aged care facility nationally, and the program is to be implemented in a partnership between the Commonwealth and the states. State public health orders will be used as the mechanism for the mandate – as per the current arrangement in some jurisdictions for aged care and acute health workers' influenza vaccinations.

Mr Morrison stated:

Now for me, mid-September that's the latest we want to see it and we would like to see it progress ... more sooner than that. But of course, we will work with the sector to ensure this is done as effectively and as safely as possible.

The detail of the scheme is yet to be released, for example, it is not known whether or not all persons who work at a facility will be defined as 'residential aged care workers' or only those who have direct resident contact. Broader roles, such as kitchen and maintenance, will possibly also be covered by the mandate.

Funding arrangements

The \$11 million funding program is intended to enable workers to attend off-site vaccination centres and GPs without loss of pay, and to cover personal leave that might be needed to recover from vaccine side-effects.

Under the grant, residential aged care facilities will be paid for the following three categories of eligible expenditure:

- Casual staff going off-site for vaccination – a flat fee of \$80 payable per staff member, per dose;
- Paid leave for casual staff who become unwell after vaccination and do not have other leave entitlements – one day's paid leave (at a rate of \$185) for up to a quarter of the provider's total number of casual staff; and
- Facilitation of off-site vaccination for employees – up to \$500 per site in flexible vaccination facilitation costs per site e.g. for transport services, arranging groups of staff to be vaccinated and or 'any other reasonable expenses that incentivise staff to get vaccinated'.

Responses to the announcement

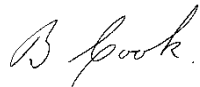
Both unions and the aged care industry have expressed concern for the low vaccination rates amongst workers to date – citing the Federal Government’s roll out arrangements.

The government’s initial roll-out plan was for aged care workers to be vaccinated at the workplace by dedicated teams – but industry participants report that the plan did not eventuate, and despite being a priority group, staff have had difficulty securing appointments with GPs or attending mass vaccination centres.

As to the announced funding, ANMF federal secretary Annie Butler says the \$11 million will equate to about \$30 per worker and is not enough support.

SIAG will publish updates upon release of additional information and detail.

If you have any questions or if you require further information, please contact the SIAG National Advisory Service on 03 9644 1400 or 1300 (SIAG HR) / 1300 742 447. The Information provided in this email is generic advice. For advice in respect of your specific situation please contact us.



Brian Cook
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