

The Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand response to the PHARMAC Consultation on the eligibility criteria for the influenza vaccine

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About the TSANZ

The Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand (TSANZ) is a health promotion charity whose mission is to lead, support and enable all health workers and researchers who aim to prevent, cure, and relieve disability caused by lung disease. TSANZ is the only Peak Body in both Australia and New Zealand that represents all health professionals working in all fields of respiratory health. The TSANZ has a membership base of over 1800 individual members from a wide range of health and research disciplines. The TSANZ is a leading provider of evidence-based guidelines for the treatment of respiratory disease in Australia and New Zealand and undertakes a large amount of professional education and training. The TSANZ is also responsible for significant research administration and coordinates an accredited respiratory laboratory program. As the leaders in lung health, we promote the:

- highest quality and standards of patient care
- development and application of knowledge about respiratory health and disease
- highest quality air standards including a tobacco smoke free society and effective regulation of novel nicotine delivery systems
- collaboration between all national organisations whose objects are to improve the wellbeing of individuals with lung disease and to promote better lung health for the community
- professional and collegiate needs of the Membership

The TSANZ are grateful for the invitation to provide feedback to the proposal to widen eligibility criteria for influenza vaccine. The influenza vaccine is known to be highly effective at preventing infection caused by influenza and is of great importance with COVID-19 still an issue around the world. We will continue to advocate through evidence-based practice and policy to improve respiratory health for all.

Consultation Topic

Pharmaceutical Management Agency of New Zealand (PHARMAC) is seeking stakeholder views on a proposal to widen eligibility criteria for the influenza vaccine.

TSANZ Feedback

The Thoracic Society are supportive of the proposal made by PHARMAC to extend the eligibility of the influenza vaccine to Māori and Pacific Islander People aged between 55-65. There is clear evidence that the health gap between Māori and Pacific Islander people and the general population remains large and this proposal is a step in the correct direction to closing this gap.

However, the Thoracic Society has further recommendations for PHARMAC to consider to further support Māori and Pacific Islander people's health. We would like to highlight that lessons from the COVID-19 vaccination rollout have shown that there has been an inequitable distribution of vaccines due to structural disadvantages and this should be taken up and addressed in any new vaccination campaign including the annual influenza vaccination.

Recommendation 1:

The Thoracic Society strongly suggest that this extension of the eligibility of the influenza vaccine to Māori and Pacific Islander People aged between 55-65 be a permanent one as opposed to being for the remainder of 2022 only. This will ensure that the vaccine is equitably accessed and health outcomes for this population improve.

Recommendation 2:

The Thoracic Society recommend PHARMAC extend the eligibility of the influenza vaccine to Māori and Pacific Islander people aged 45+. Overall health outcomes of Māori and Pacific Islander people aged 45+ are significantly worse, especially in the respiratory health space¹. This will help to improve health outcomes for this population and narrow the health gap.

Recommendation 3:

The Thoracic Society propose the eligibility criteria be extended to those who have a community services card or living in poorer areas (deciles 6+). People with low incomes and those living in these areas are more vulnerable to worse health outcomes, and as such would benefit from an extension of the eligibility criteria of the influenza vaccine.

Concluding Remarks

Each year more than 200,000 New Zealanders contract influenza and an estimated 500 of these infections result in death. The Thoracic Society praise PHARMAC for the proposal to widen the eligibility criteria but stress that this eligibility should be extended indefinitely to reduce the number of influenza cases and save lives across New Zealand every year. We hope to continue to work together to tackle respiratory health issues and to improve respiratory health for all New Zealanders.

Yours Sincerely,



Dr James Fingleton PhD, MRCP
President NZ Branch
Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand

¹ Ministry of Health NZ. 2018. *Respiratory disease*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/populations/maori-health/tatau-kahukura-maori-health-statistics/nga-mana-hauora-tutohu-health-status-indicators/respiratory-disease>>.