

MEETING OF NATIONAL CABINET

MEDIA RELEASE

16 Jul 2022

Prime Minister

Today the National Cabinet met virtually to discuss the evolving situation with the COVID 19 pandemic and agreed several new measures.

The Commonwealth and all States and Territories remain committed to working together collaboratively to support the COVID-19 health response, as Australians continue to manage the impacts of this pandemic.

Chief Medical Officer Professor Paul Kelly provided an update on the pandemic, including new variants and their potential impact, and the impacts on hospital capacity and broader health system. Australia is beginning to see a new wave of COVID-19 infections driven by the BA.4 and BA.5 Omicron sub variants, which will increase the pressure on our health system.

In recognition of the risks associated with more infectious new variants through the winter period, the Commonwealth agreed to reinstate the Pandemic Leave Disaster Payment to 30 September 2022. Eligibility for the payment will be backdated to 1 July 2022, to ensure that anyone unable to work owing to isolation requirements in this period, without access to paid sick leave, is supported. Access to these payments will commence from Wednesday 20 July, with existing eligibility requirements to continue.

We have agreed to share the costs of the payment 50:50, between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories.

In addition the Commonwealth Government will also reinstate the Crisis Payment – National Health Emergency (COVID-19) until 30 September 2022, with eligibility also to be backdated to 1 July 2022. This will ensure people affected by COVID-19 isolation requirements who receive an income support payment or ABSTUDY Living Allowance, and who are in severe financial hardship, continue to receive support through the winter period.

The Commonwealth has further agreed to create a new, temporary telehealth item so GPs can spend longer with their patients to assess their suitability for oral COVID-19 antivirals. This will enable those most vulnerable to COVID-19 to quickly access medical treatments and help ease the burden on hospitals.

State and Territory Premiers and Chief Ministers also shared updates from across each jurisdiction, including noting initiatives such as increasing access to supplies of Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs).

All First Ministers agreed:

- Jurisdictions will utilise existing RAT stocks funded through 50/50 cost share arrangements with the Commonwealth to support the public health response.
- Jurisdictions and the Commonwealth will provide consistent health messaging encouraging Australians to follow the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee's recommendations on health behaviours including wearing masks indoors, getting tested and practising good respiratory hygiene.

The National Cabinet remains committed to working together on national priorities, including supporting all Australians impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. National Cabinet will continue to meet as necessary.



PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA