

Health Minister Mark Butler media releases 2023

Headline	Announcement topic	Date	Keyword/s	Discussion related to COVID-19 pandemic
Australia supporting safe, quality medicines in our region	\$13.3 million investment to support access to high-quality, safe and effective medicine in Pacific and Southeast Asia	13 July 2023	COVID and pandemic	Investment builds on regional partner agreements during the pandemic, to support the region's "recovery from COVID-19".
Widened eligibility for oral antiviral Paxlovid, plus new medicines on PBS	From 1 July 23, Australians with thrombocytopenia and diabetic kidney disease will have access to new medicines through PBS.	2 July 2023	COVID	PBS eligibility criteria for the COVID-19 oral antiviral treatment Paxlovid will be further expanded to include individuals aged 50-59 years with one risk factor for severe illness – instead of two.
Appointment of new Secretary of the Department of Health and Aged Care	Mr Blair Comley PSM appointed as Secretary for Department of Health and Aged Care	13 June 2023	Pandemic	"Australians got to know Professor Murphy throughout the pandemic as he led the Department during its biggest public health response in over 100 years"
Budget 2023-24: Building a stronger Medicare	Pre-Budget announcement about strengthening Medicare	9 May 2023	COVID	Medicines to treat COVID-19 are being expanded or added to PBS
\$50 million for research into long COVID	Australian Government to provide a further \$50 million from the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) for research into post-acute sequelae of COVID-19 – commonly known as long COVID	24 April 2023	COVID	<p>Additional funding to what has already been provided for research related to long COVID to "generate evidence to inform policy, improve health outcomes and increase awareness of the condition in the community".</p> <p>Commitment to support a strong healthcare system.</p> <p>This additional funding comes as the final report from the House Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport's Inquiry into long COVID and repeated COVID infections was tabled in Parliament.</p> <p>Department of Health and Aged Care will develop a national plan to respond to long COVID, with consideration of committee's findings.</p> <p>Quote: "Long COVID is an emerging health issue, both in Australia and internationally."</p>
Strengthening Medicare with \$220m in GP Grants	Australian Government delivering on key election commitment to strengthen GP practices across the country.	20 April 2023	Pandemic	Quote: "After working tirelessly throughout the pandemic, doctors deserve more than thanks, that's why we're giving them the resources to invest in their practices".
Professor Brendan Murphy AC retirement	Announcement of Professor Brendan Murphy AC from position as Secretary of the Department of Health and Aged Care, effective 6 July 2023	13 April 2023	COVID and pandemic	<p>"Australians got to know Professor Murphy throughout the pandemic as he led the Department during its biggest public health response in over 100 years"</p> <p>In addition to COVID, Murphy oversaw start of aged care, mental health, primary care and health workforce reform.</p>
Expanded access to subsidised oral antiviral Paxlovid and other COVID-19 supports	From 1 April 2023, people aged 60 to 69 will have access to antiviral treatment Paxlovid under PBS	30 March 2023	COVID and pandemic	<p>PBS eligibility criteria for the COVID-19 oral antiviral treatment Paxlovid will be further expanded to include individuals aged 60 to 69 years with one risk factor for severe illness – instead of two.</p> <p>People to discuss treatment options with their GP or nurse practitioner should they test positive.</p> <p>One million Australians received their 2023 booster dose.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 70% of people who have had a booster are 60 or older <p>"With the risk of serious illness from COVID-19 increasing with age, particularly for those over 70, this will provide important protection as Australia moves into the cooler months, when other viruses circulate"</p> <p>Changes will be made from 31 March to the way in which the Government reports vaccine uptake to shift from numbered doses to time-based.</p> <p>On April 2, the Government to launch a booster campaign across a range of media.</p> <p>Aged Care Worker COVID-19 leave grants available from 1 April to support permanent or casual aged care workers caring for older Australians when they are required to take leave related to COVID-19 and have no leave entitlements available.</p>

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				<p>High Risk Settings Pandemic Payment ends 31 March.</p> <p>CMO Professor Paul Kelly released report on the fourth Omicron wave, “which ended in late February, was longer than previous waves but led to less severe illness than the third wave in winter 2022”.</p> <p>“Professor Kelly says the focus of Australia’s response to the pandemic should continue to be on improving health outcomes for those at greatest risk of severe illness from COVID-19, including older Australians, those with disability, those with complex pre-existing medical conditions, and the immune-compromised.”</p>
End of COVID-19 predeparture requirement in China	Australia’s pre-departure COVID-19 testing requirements for travellers from China, Hong Kong and Macau ends 11 March 2023	9 March 2023	COVID	<p>Measure initiated on 5 January 2023 “out of an abundance of caution in response to a significant wave of COVID-19 infections in China and the risk of potential new emerging variants”.</p> <p>Reports showed cases, hospitalisations and deaths in China peaked in late December/early January; and to date, no reports of new variants of concern.</p> <p>“Since the measure was introduced, the Government has strengthened Australia’s capacity to detect and respond to emerging variants of concern of international origin – including extending community wastewater testing”</p>
Supplies secured of latest Moderna COVID-19 vaccine as recommended by Halton Review	Australian Government has secured an additional 3 million doses of the latest Moderna Omicron-specific COVID-19 vaccine to ensure an adequate portfolio of vaccines	28 February 2023	COVID	<p>Latest Moderna vaccine, Spikevax Bivalent Original/Omicron BA.4-5, granted provisional approval from TGA, expected to be available in Australia from April</p> <p>ATAGI advice recommends this vaccine to be made available for eligible people 12 years and older as a COVID booster.</p> <p>In response to recommendations made by Professor Jane Halton AO in her review of Australia’s procurement arrangements for COVID-19 vaccines and treatments.</p> <p>Government accepts 7 recommendation from the review in full, remaining recommendations partially accepted.</p> <p>Prof Halton’s review includes recommendations for public health campaign around vaccine uptake, updated COVID-19 policy framework, streamlining of advisory structures, review of vaccine distribution arrangements and need to ensure adequate supply of therapeutics and vaccines across 2023 and 2024.</p> <p>““Work has already commenced on implementing Halton’s recommendations, including releasing the COVID-19 Management Plan for 2023 and preparing a new advertising campaign to ensure everyone in Australia, especially populations in vulnerable situations, continue to have the information and awareness to make decisions that help protect themselves and others from COVID.”</p>
Review of National Hospital Funding Agreement	Five-year agreement on public hospital funding between Australian Government all states and territories is being independently reviewed	24 February 2023	COVID and pandemic	<p>The review will consider whether the objectives of the National Health Reform Agreement are being met, including the impact of external factors (such as the COVID-19 pandemic) on the demand for hospital services and the flow-on effects.</p>
\$5 million to support primary health care in Lismore	Healthcare providers in Lismore to receive additional support to rebuild infrastructure etc as the recovery from the floods continues.	17 February 2023	COVID and pandemic	<p>“The Lismore community has shown great resilience in the face of disaster over the past few years, including the flooding during 2022, bushfires in 2019-20 and the COVID-19 pandemic.”</p>
All adults now eligible for a 2023 COVID-19 booster dose	Updated eligibility from ATAGI that all adults who have not had a COVID-19 booster or confirmed case in the past	8 February 2023	COVID	<p>Updated advice from ATAGI for COVID booster “to give them additional protection against severe illness from COVID”</p>

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	<p>six months can now get another booster, irrespective of how many prior doses a person has received</p>			<p>Strong recommendations for everyone at risk of severe illness – 65 years and older, as well as younger adults who have medical comorbidities, disability or complex health needs.</p> <p>Otherwise healthy children and teenagers do not need a booster at this time – due to low incidence of severe illness and "high level of hybrid immunity amongst this cohort".</p> <p>Ongoing surveillance of COVID-19 infection rates, new variants and vaccine effectiveness will determine any future recommendations it makes concerning additional booster doses.</p> <p>Aged Care providers will be advised of the new requirements for additional booster doses.</p>
<p>Annual private health insurance premium rise</p>	<p>Australian Government is ensuring Australians get value for money from their private health insurance as the annual industry average premium is set to rise by 2.9 percent</p>	<p>6 February 2023</p>	<p>COVID and pandemic</p>	<p>Some providers continue to offer reduced insurance premiums, cashbacks, expanded benefits and other measures, introduced in response to COVID-19 pandemic.</p>
<p>Professor John Skerritt retirement</p>	<p>Professor John Skerritt to retire from his position of Deputy Secretary Health Products Regulation Group, effective 18 April 2023</p>	<p>2 February 2023</p>	<p>COVID</p>	<p>Professor Skerritt has had many achievements over the course of his career including...the rapid registration of COVID vaccines and treatments...</p>
<p>Travellers from China required to undertake COVID-19 testing before travel</p>	<p>Australian Government to introduce pre-departure testing for COVID-19 requirement for people travelling to Australia from the People's Republic of China</p>	<p>1 January 2023</p>	<p>COVID and pandemic</p>	<p>Measure in response to significant wave of COVID infections in China and the potential for emerging viral variants.</p> <p>Travellers required to undertake a COVID-19 test within 48 hours prior to travel to Australia.</p> <p>"No longer in the emergency phase of the pandemic response in Australia" – this decision made to safeguard Australia from risk of potential new emerging variants and in recognition of rapidly evolving situation in China.</p> <p>Other countries also implemented similar measures.</p> <p>These arrangements are "precautionary and temporary and will remain under review".</p> <p>We continue to work on improving our capacity to detect and rapidly respond to any new emerging variants of concern.</p> <p>No advice to change our current approach to managing this phase of the pandemic in Australia. Fortunately, in Australia we have readily available access to vaccines and treatments, and high underlying population immunity.</p> <p>If eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine, should have one. "Staying up to date with vaccinations is one of the simplest actions people can take to help protect themselves from becoming severely unwell from COVID-19".</p> <p>"Australia is well positioned in its pandemic response. We continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation in Australia and internationally, in collaboration with medical experts. Our absolute priority is keeping our community safe and continuing to be a world leader when it comes to responding to the global COVID-19 pandemic."</p>