



Thursday 18th February 2021

Dear friends,

COVID-19 vaccination will be available soon

From next week the Government will begin offering free COVID-19 vaccinations to residents and workers in residential aged care, making us among the first Australians to be offered a COVID-19 vaccine. We do not know when Harbison will take its turn, but we have stepped up our preparations based on information released by the Government yesterday.

Information for residents

You can access information about the vaccination program on the Department of Health website using this link <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/covid-19-vaccination-resource-pack-for-residential-aged-care>

There are also links on our website to the same resources, and we will provide you and/or your decision-maker with this information prior to vaccination. After you receive the information, we will clinically assess you to determine whether you are suitable for vaccination. If we are unsure about clinical suitability, we will consult with experts e.g., your doctor. We will tell you whether you are suitable as soon as the clinical assessment is complete. Not everyone will be able to have the vaccination.

If you are suitable for vaccination you or your guardian will need to decide whether to consent to or decline the vaccination. If you consent, we will ask you to complete a written consent form. We will then inform the Government's immunisation contractor that you require a dose and inform you of the allocated vaccination date.

On vaccination day we will clinically assess you again to check that you are well enough to have your dose and the immunisation contractor will also assess your health and check your consent, before administering the vaccine and recording your vaccination status in the Australian Immunisation Register.

The vaccine requires two doses for maximum effectiveness, and we will inform you of the date for your second dose. We will monitor your health carefully after you have been vaccinated and if you experience any problems, we will ensure you receive the treatment, comfort, and support you need.

We strongly encourage everyone who is suitable to take up vaccination to reduce the risk of hospitalisation or death if you become infected with COVID-19. If you have any concerns or questions about the vaccine you can speak to any member of our clinical team, or your GP or health professional, or the independent advocacy group OPAN (ph. 1800 700 600).

Information for workers

The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, the key decision-making committee for health emergencies, has not recommended making COVID-19 vaccination mandatory for residential aged care workers, but has indicated that if the vaccine proves to be effective in reducing transmission then vaccination may become mandatory.

Residential care is a high-risk setting for COVID-19 transmission, and the aged care workforce has proven to be the vector of transmission into residential aged care facilities, causing deadly outbreaks. We are high-risk vaccine candidates, and the Chief Medical Officer has made it clear that it is a high priority to vaccinate as many of us as possible before winter.

Subject to contraindication, Harbison strongly recommends that employees, volunteers, and frequently attending contractors take up COVID-19 vaccination, to reduce their individual risk of hospitalisation or death if you become infected. We are also mindful that the vaccine may reduce the risk of transmission, thereby protecting residents from infected workers, particularly those residents who are not suitable for the vaccine.

You will be provided with information about the vaccine and asked whether you agree to participate in the vaccination program. If you are unsure of your clinical suitability you will be offered access to clinical advice to determine your suitability.

If you agree to participate, we will require your written consent and will notify you of your vaccination date. On vaccination day you will be screened by the Government immunisation provider to confirm suitability and consent. The vaccine will be administered by the Government immuniser and your vaccination will be recorded in the Australian Immunisation record. We will inform you of the date of your second vaccination.

If you decline to participate you will be required to complete a refusal form acknowledging that you were offered a free COVID-19 vaccine registered by the Therapeutic Goods Administration, that you accept responsibility for the increased workplace health and safety risk your decision may involve, and that in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak you may be redeployed or stood down without pay due to your high-risk status. If COVID-19 vaccination subsequently becomes mandatory for residential aged care workers, you may incur costs accessing the vaccine at that time.

To minimise the risk of COVID-19 infection for new employees and volunteers, from 22 February 2021 a current COVID-19 vaccination will be a condition of employment at Harbison, subject to contraindication and a vaccine being reasonably available.

Resident outings and excursions

I am pleased to confirm that the temporary suspension of resident outings and excursions has been lifted. Risk assessments of gatherings are still necessary to avoid the need for self-isolation when residents return to Harbison, and each resident must be clinically assessed on their return regardless of how long they were out.

We require residents to wear surgical masks in taxis or share-rides, and any venue prescribed from time to time by NSW Health. Residents must also comply with any gathering restrictions in force at the time for their outing and are expected to practice COVID-19 precautions: hand hygiene, cough and sneeze etiquette, social distancing, and wearing a surgical mask when social distancing is not practical. Residents should exercise care not to come into contact with anyone who is a confirmed COVID-19 case or a close or casual contact of a COVID-19 case and should avoid the locations listed as areas of concern by NSW Health.

Prior to any outing, our care staff will support residents to understand the current risk environment and ensure they know how to keep themselves as safe as possible beyond the security of Harbison.

Thank you for reading this letter. I will be among the first to agree to participate in the vaccination program at Harbison. The program represents a turning point in the pandemic and a historic scientific and logistical challenge. Harbison will work very carefully to make the vaccination process as simple as possible. Throughout the pandemic we have all played our part to keep everyone safe, and Australians have demonstrated the power of collective action by sacrificing for the good of our communities.

Thanks to our residents and their families, our volunteers, our local GPs, the local hospitals, our friends at other providers, and our hard-working staff and in many cases their families, Harbison is seen as a leader in helping to keep COVID-19 out of the Southern Highlands. We expect a high uptake of the vaccine at Harbison, which should significantly reduce the risk that COVID-19 poses to everyone who lives or works here. Vaccination will not eliminate the risk, and it will be some time before the post-COVID era begins, but it is a critical step on the path out of the pandemic. Please raise any questions or concerns with your care team, or if you work at Harbison your manager. We value your feedback and suggestions.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Cochran', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David Cochran
Chief Executive Officer