

**2021**

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**Chief Health Officer Report on the Status of the Public Health Emergency due to  
COVID-19 Report 17 – 9 August 2021**

**Presented by  
Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA  
Minister for Health  
16 September 2021**





**ACT**  
Government

**ACT Health**

Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA  
Minister for Health  
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London Circuit  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Minister

**CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER REPORT ON THE STATUS OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH  
EMERGENCY DUE TO COVID-19 – 9 AUGUST 2021**

Please find herein my report to you, as Minister for Health, in relation to the declaration of a public health emergency in the ACT due to COVID-19.

Section 119 (4B) of the *Public Health Act 1997* provides that if the “COVID-19 declaration has been extended or further extended under subsection (4), the chief health officer must advise the Minister at least every 30 days about—

- (a) the status of the emergency; and
- (b) whether the chief health officer considers the declaration is still justified.”

Minister, my advice is that COVID-19 continues to pose a public health risk to the ACT community. My recommendation to you, as of 9 August 2021, is that the public health emergency declaration in the ACT be extended for a further 90 days effective from 16 August 2021 until 14 November 2021, subject to regular review.

All Australian jurisdictions are maintaining public health emergency status or similar at this time and continue to focus on the suppression of COVID-19.

Yours sincerely

Dr Kerry Coleman  
Chief Health Officer  
9 August 2021

# CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER REPORT ON THE STATUS OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY DUE TO COVID-19 – 9 AUGUST 2021

## Declaration of a public health emergency in the ACT

A public health emergency declaration is in force in the ACT due to the public health risk of COVID-19 to the ACT community. The public health emergency declaration is scheduled to expire on 16 August 2021. As Chief Health Officer, I make a recommendation to the Minister for Health that the public health emergency declaration be extended for a further 90 days due to the ongoing public health risk COVID-19 presents.

The public health emergency declaration enables me, as Chief Health Officer, to take necessary actions to reduce threats to public health, including issuing public health directions that aim to limit the spread of COVID-19 in our community. These directions include the requirement for returned international travellers to undertake hotel quarantine and for confirmed cases of COVID-19 and their close contacts to self-isolate.

The ACT's public health response to COVID-19 is guided by the advice of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) and National Cabinet.

## Global situational update

Globally, as of 6 August 2021, there have been 200,840,180 confirmed cases of COVID-19, and sadly 4,265,903 deaths reported to the World Health Organization (WHO)<sup>1</sup>.

After a decline in international cases in late April 2021, cases and deaths have steadily increased since mid-June 2021, with over 4 million cases reported in the past week. This trend is largely attributable to increases in cases in the Americas, Europe and Western Pacific regions. The Americas and Europe reported the greatest number of weekly cases and deaths by population size. Cases have also increased significantly in the past week in the United States of America (USA), India, Indonesia and Brazil.

The Delta variant has become the dominant strain of COVID-19 circulating in a number of countries, and is increasing in countries where vaccination rates remain below the modelled threshold for widespread protection against outbreaks. The Delta variant is now responsible for more than 80% of COVID-19 cases being reported in the USA, the United Kingdom, Spain, India, Italy and Germany.

On 4 August 2021, China reported its highest number of locally transmitted COVID-19 cases since January 2021, and commenced mass testing of the population of Wuhan due to an outbreak of the Delta variant.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports> Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) Weekly Epidemiological Update and Weekly Operational Update, accessed 9 August 2021

## National situational update<sup>2</sup>

As at 9:00am on 9 August 2021, there have been a total of 36,330 cases of COVID-19 reported in Australia and 936 deaths. Nationally, there were 1,897 new locally acquired cases reported in the past seven days, with an additional 44 overseas acquired cases. The vast majority of locally acquired cases in the past 30 days were associated with the Greater Sydney Outbreak. Across Australia, there is currently an estimated 4,727 active cases and 433 cases hospitalised.

Over the past month, COVID-19 outbreaks have occurred in several jurisdictions and the Greater Sydney Outbreak which began in July has steadily grown. Widespread seeding of cases throughout Australia over the past month have resulted in the ACT declaring multiple jurisdictions and interstate locations as COVID-19 Areas of Concern with associated travel restrictions implemented to limit risk of the virus spreading to the ACT.

In Queensland, there have been over 100 locally acquired cases linked to the Indooroopilly cluster, resulting in the Queensland Government announcing a seven-day lockdown commencing from 31 July 2021 for 11 impacted Local Government Areas (LGAs) of South East Queensland. While the Queensland lockdown restrictions were in place, the ACT introduced stay-at-home requirements for all travellers who had been in the 11 impacted LGAs and restricted entry to non-ACT residents, with exemptions only granted in exceptional circumstances. Lockdown restrictions for the 11 affected LGAs were lifted by the Queensland Government on 8 August 2021, and correspondingly removed in the ACT.

On the same day, the Queensland Government announced a three-day period of lockdown for the Cairns Regional Council and Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire in response to a new positive case detected in a taxi driver linked to a previous positive case in a pilot who travelled in the person's taxi. The ACT Government introduced a stay-at-home requirement for the Cairns Regional Council and Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council mirroring Queensland's restrictions. Whilst these restrictions are in place, non-ACT residents seeking to travel to the ACT from these areas must not enter without an approved exemption. ACT residents who have spent time in these areas on or after 29 July 2021 may return to the ACT but must complete an online declaration form within 24 hours prior to arriving in the ACT and travel directly to the residence where they are spending the stay-at-home period and may leave only for an approved purpose.

On 15 July 2021, the Victorian Government announced a state-wide lockdown in response to an outbreak of cases that was seeded from the Greater Sydney outbreak. Lockdown restrictions were lifted on 27 July 2021 and reintroduced on 5 August 2021. The ACT implemented stay at home restrictions which require returning ACT residents to complete an online declaration and non-ACT residents to seek an exemption before travel. Currently, these requirements remain in place for any person who has been in Greater Melbourne after 11:59pm on 5 August 2021 with restrictions for regional Victoria were removed from 11:59pm on 9 August 2021.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/coronavirus-covid-19-current-situation-and-case-numbers#covid19-summary-statistics> Coronavirus (COVID-19) at a glance – 9 August 2021, Australian Government Department of Health, accessed 9 August 2021

## New South Wales situation

The COVID-19 situation in NSW continues to evolve. In response to a rise in locally acquired cases in the Greater Sydney region, particularly a persisting proportion that were infectious in community, the ACT declared Greater Sydney, Blue Mountains, Central Coast, Wollongong and Shellharbour as COVID-19 Affected Areas on 9 July 2021. Greater Sydney and the surrounding regions remain as COVID-19 Affected areas in response to ongoing community transmission. On 28 July 2021, the NSW Government extended the Greater Sydney lockdown measures to 28 August 2021. There are currently over 8,000 cases linked to the Greater Sydney outbreak.

At this time, anyone who leaves a NSW COVID-19 affected area and travels to the ACT must enter quarantine for 14 days upon their arrival in the ACT. ACT residents and non-ACT residents are required to obtain an approved exemption from ACT Health prior to their travel however ACT residents automatically receive an exemption and are supported to safely quarantine at their home.

In response to the NSW Government's announcement of several exposure locations, travellers from Orange City Council, Blayney Shire Council and Cabonne Shire Council local government areas (LGAs) were temporarily required to adhere to stay at home requirements from 21 July 2021 until restrictions were lifted on 27 July 2021.

On 9 August 2021, the ACT Government declared Tamworth Regional Council, Byron Shire, City of Lismore, Ballina Shire Council and Richmond Valley Council as COVID-19 affected areas in addition to the LGAs of Armidale, Dubbo, Newcastle, Muswellbrook Shire and Singleton which were declared as COVID-19 affected areas on 5 August 2021. These declarations are in response to the identification of positive cases and/or positive wastewater detections.

Currently, there are more than 700 individuals from a COVID-19 Affected area in quarantine in the ACT. To date, ACT Health has received 6,756 exemption requests from travellers from NSW, of which 2,943 have been approved, 2,236 have not been approved, 591 have been withdrawn and/or are not required under the Public Health Direction and 774 applications are yet to be processed or ACT Health is awaiting further information.

ACT Health continues to closely monitor the NSW situation and in particular, Canberra's surrounding region, and may introduce further travel restrictions if needed to minimise the risk of virus transmission in the ACT.

## **ACT situational update**

As of 9 August 2021, there are no active COVID-19 cases in the ACT and there is currently no evidence of community transmission. Of the ACT's 124 cases, 121 cases have recovered, and sadly there were three deaths early in the pandemic. There have been no new cases notified in the ACT in the past 30 days.

As of 11.59pm on 8 August 2021, the total number of vaccine doses administered by the ACT Government is 156,171.

There is currently no mandatory requirement to wear face masks in the ACT except at Canberra Airport and on flights departing and arriving into the ACT, however ACT Health continues to encourage people to wear masks in settings where physical distancing is not possible such as public transport or crowded indoor venues.

Checking in using the Check In CBR app at certain businesses, venues and locations is a requirement for anyone aged 16 years and older, regardless of how long they will be on the premises. From 15 July 2021, the use of the Check In CBR app in all retail settings, public transport, and taxi and rideshare services became mandatory in addition to restricted businesses and venues where this requirement was already in place. The expanded coverage of the Check In CBR app helps to ensure contact tracing teams are able to access the best available data to quickly and effectively contact any individual who may be exposed to a COVID-19 case in the ACT.

As of 1 August 2021, more than 17,000 venues had registered with Check In CBR, over 30 million people had checked in using the app, and the app had been downloaded 912,004 times. The use of the Check In CBR app by patrons attending businesses and venues in the ACT provides additional assurance to ACT Health and the local community that contact tracing teams can respond quickly and effectively if a new locally acquired case is identified.

As of 9 August 2021, there are 930 people in quarantine in the ACT being supported by ACT Health, the majority of whom are individuals who have been in a COVID-19 affected area and are quarantining at their home residence. The ACT is continuing to manage the frequent return of diplomats and government officials travelling to Canberra for official duties.

The Health Protection Service, Access Canberra and ACT Policing are continuing to undertake compliance and enforcement activity across the ACT community to help protect the community as the pandemic response continues. Compliance activities are currently focused on supporting the use of the Check In CBR app and maximum occupancy compliance.

As of 9 August 2021, ACT Policing has issued 21 infringements (three businesses and the 18 to individuals), 16 cautions, and made five arrests for the breach of COVID-19 Public Health Directions. ACT Policing will continue to conduct COVID-19 compliance activities including checking of individuals subject to current directions such as mandatory quarantine.

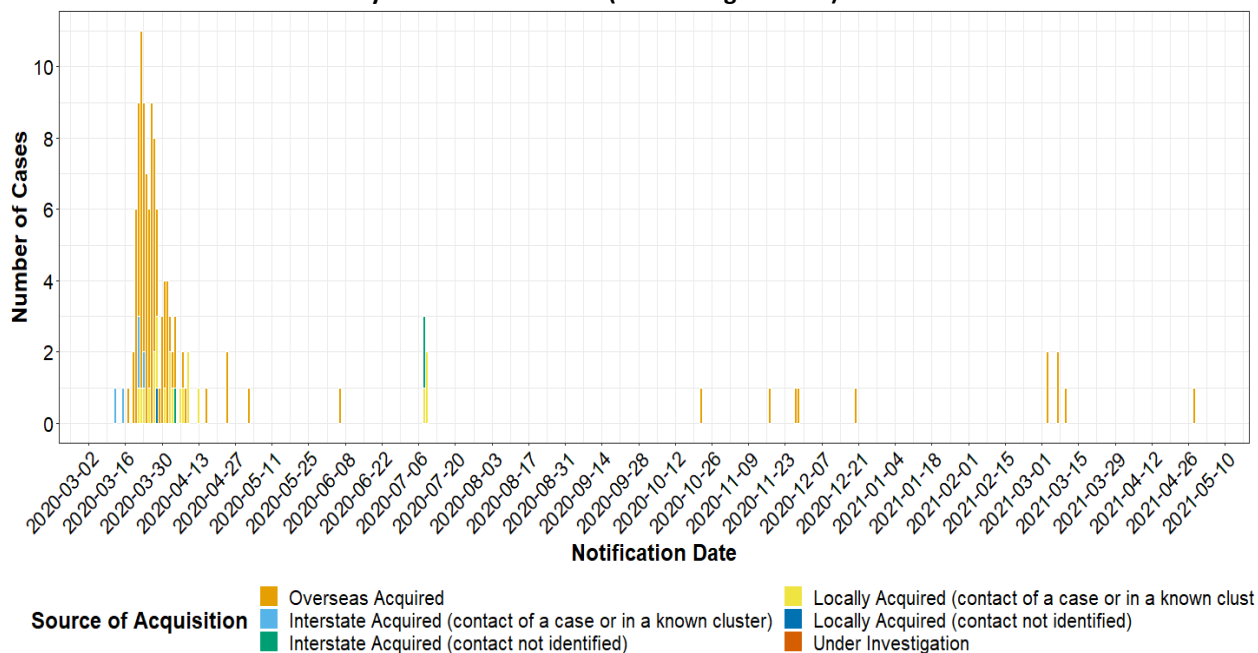
Access Canberra has undertaken a total of 10,396 proactive inspections and engagements across businesses and industry impacted by public health directions and COVID-19 restrictions as of 31 July 2021, with a focus on ensuring businesses and the wider community are complying with restrictions under the *Public Health (Restricted Activities – Gatherings, Business or Undertakings) Emergency Direction 2020 (No 4)*, including the expansion of the Check In CBR app to retail settings.

As of 31 July 2021, Health Protection Service (HPS) has undertaken 6,505 proactive inspections and engagements across businesses and industry to ensure compliance with the Direction and associated restrictions. The commencement of the Public Health (Check In Requirements) Emergency Direction 2021 on 1 July 2021 captured retail businesses that had been previously outside the scope of Directions with check in requirements such as supermarkets and clothing retailers. The new Direction requires all non-essential businesses and retail settings to be registered and to take reasonable steps to ensure patrons record their attendance using the Check In CBR app. The majority of inspections conducted by HPS are food businesses (5,815), with a smaller proportion of infection control premises (290), retailers (204) places of worship (113) and swimming pools (83). No warning letters were issued during the reporting period.

There was a significant increase in COVID-19 related complaints with a total of 29 COVID-19 complaints received this reporting period, resulting in 24 investigations being undertaken; compared to sixteen 16 COVID-19 complaints that resulted in 14 investigations in the last reporting period to June 2021. The complaints were diverse but mainly related to Check In CBR (availability of the QR code and patrons not checking in) and mandatory face mask directions. One complaint was related to interstate courier drivers and this was resolved by providing information clarifying the scope of the exemption.

The rate of food business compliance with public health directions across the ACT dropped over this reporting period. The drop in compliance can be attributed to non-compliance with COVID Safety Plan and maximum occupancy requirements. Access Canberra and Health Protection Service are actively engaging with business to ensure they understand their requirements under the Public Health Directions and to resolve any non-compliance. The rate of compliance with public health directions across the ACT remains relatively stable although a reduction in compliance with occupancy limits and/or COVID-19 Safety Plan requirements has been noted. Access Canberra and Health Protection Service are actively engaging with business to ensure they understand their requirements under the Public Health Directions and to resolve non-compliance.

**Confirmed ACT COVID-19 cases by date of notification (as at 9 August 2021)**



### ACT COVID-19 Vaccination Program

The rollout of the ACT’s COVID-19 Vaccination Program is progressing well. ACT Health’s priority is to ensure that the rollout progresses in an efficient, accessible, and above all, safe manner.

More than half of the ACT’s adult population has now had at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose and 25% are fully vaccinated. The ACT is on track to deliver both doses for all individuals aged 16 years and over, who choose to be vaccinated, by December 2021 (subject to supply).



Approximately 87 general practices and respiratory clinics are onboarded as Commonwealth COVID-19 Vaccinating Sites administering Pfizer and/or AstraZeneca vaccines to eligible Canberrans. Of these GP's 23 are administering Pfizer. Over time, the Commonwealth Government will approve more general practices as Commonwealth Vaccinating Sites (noting that 142 general practitioners currently vaccinate in some form across the ACT).

The Commonwealth-led program for vaccinations in Residential Aged Care Facilities is being closely monitored by ACT Health, with some improvements in staff vaccination uptake. The ACT Government encourages aged care workers to come forward for COVID-19 vaccination. Since early June, ACT Health has offered all consenting unvaccinated aged care staff can be contacted directly for a priority booking for Pfizer as part of an expedited booking process.

The ACT Government has three mass vaccination clinics in operation. The Garran COVID-19 mass vaccination clinic is administering the Pfizer vaccine and the Calvary Public Hospital COVID-19 vaccination clinic is administering the AstraZeneca vaccine. The recently opened third mass vaccination clinic at the Canberra Airport Precinct is increasing the delivery of Pfizer doses to the Canberra community. Across the three dedicated ACT Government clinics there is currently capacity to administer more than 15,000 vaccination doses per week. This capacity will be rapidly scaled up as Commonwealth supply of vaccine is received in coming weeks and months.

The ACT Government COVID-19 vaccination clinics are administering vaccinations to the identified priority groups in line with the national rollout strategy. In addition, anyone aged 30 years and over and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 12 years and over are eligible for vaccination. To ensure that groups such as healthcare, aged care and disability workers can access an earlier vaccination ACT Health has reserved 2,000 vaccination appointments per week to support these priority workforces.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has approved the use of Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine to include children and young people aged 12 to 15 years. The Australian Government has accepted the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) recommendation to expand program eligibility to those children and young people with underlying medical conditions, disability, or who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. This approval may impact any predicted vaccination coverage targets.

Canberran children aged between 12 and 15 years of age who are at greater risk from the effects of COVID-19 are now eligible to book a Pfizer vaccination, including those aged 12 years and older who have a specified underlying medical condition, disability or are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Under the national rollout, pregnant women are eligible to book a Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine appointment. However, it is recommended that pregnant women continue to discuss their vaccination with their health professional prior to making a booking.

The ACT Government Vaccination Clinics are live on the Australian Government's Vaccine Eligibility Checker. Eligible Canberrans can make a booking online, with the Checker linking people directly to the MyDHR Digital Health Record platform. The ACT Government COVID-19 vaccination phone booking line is also available for those who are unable to register for MyDHR or who prefer to speak with someone to make a booking.

On Tuesday 3 August, eligibility for vaccination in the ACT Government clinics was opened for people aged 30 to 39 years. On this single day, 21,823 bookings were made, with 94% of these bookings made by those in the 30 to 39 eligibility cohort. Many of this cohort (over 20,000) had registered their interest in anticipation of the expanded eligibility and were able to streamline their booking.

ACT Health is continuing to work with the Commonwealth, Public Health Network and aged care sector to assist staff to receive vaccinations through fast-tracked appointments at ACT Government clinics and primary care.

The ACT's priority continues to be the delivery of a safe, efficient and targeted vaccination program. The ACT Government is working closely with the Commonwealth Government to ensure Canberrans are well informed about the vaccination program.

### **Surveillance and monitoring**

Testing numbers in the ACT continue to reflect the COVID-19 case situation across Australia with a total of 279,109 negative tests conducted as of 9 August 2021.

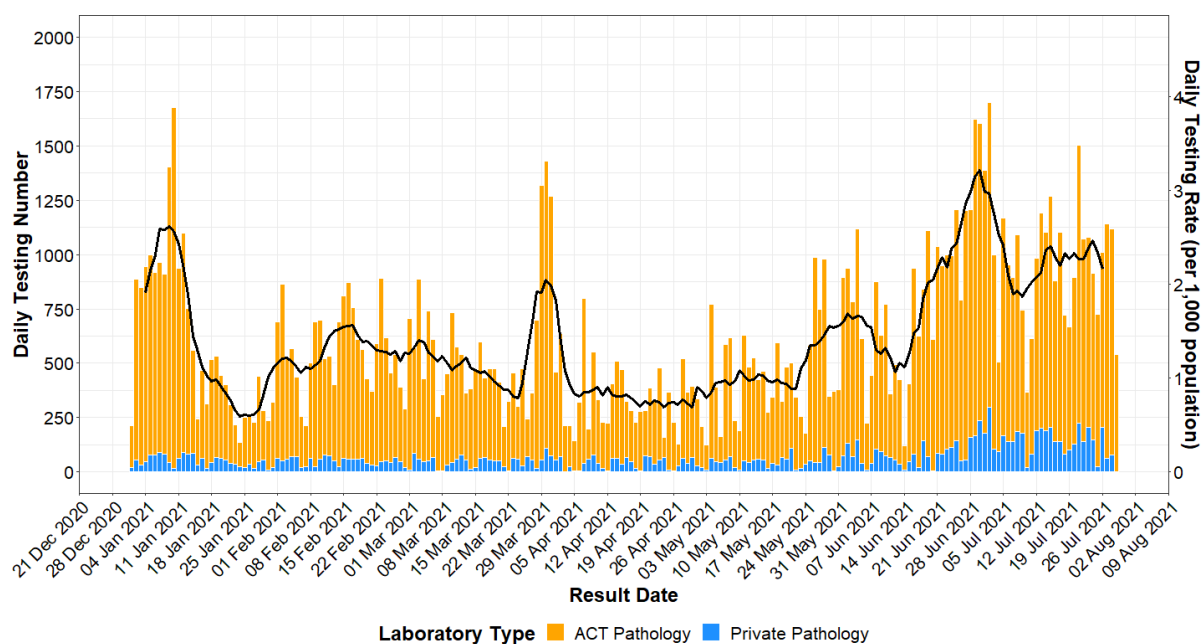
There have been no new cases of COVID-19 detected in the past 30 days and there is no evidence of community transmission. This is a testament to Canberrans continuing to do the right thing by following the latest public health advice, including notifying ACT Health before returning from a COVID-19 affected area, observing quarantine or stay at home requirements, and getting tested when required.

The number of tests undertaken in the past 30 days remains above 2 tests per 1,000 population per day. Furthermore, COVID-19 tests continue to be routinely conducted for influenza-like illness outbreaks in aged care facilities and for individuals hospitalised with respiratory illness. These surveillance mechanisms provides confidence in the ACT's ability to detect a positive case if incursion from another jurisdiction was to occur.

No fragments of COVID-19 have been detected in ACT's wastewater in the past 30 days.

ACT Health is continuing to encourage all Canberrans to present for testing if experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms, no matter how mild, to ensure any positive cases in the community are quickly identified. Strong testing rates are crucial for ACT Health to maintain rigorous surveillance of the COVID-19 situation and act quickly if a case is detected.

## All COVID-19 tests for ACT Residents in the ACT by result date: all laboratories (as at 1 July 2021)



### The ACT community's response

The ACT is operating under 'COVID normal' restrictions. The efforts of the ACT community, including businesses, have been, and continue to be, vital in slowing the spread of COVID-19. Businesses are asked to follow their COVID Safety Plans to support the safety of the community and their staff. For certain restricted businesses, venues and facilities, as well as all retail settings, public transport and taxi and rideshare services, the use of the Check In CBR app is mandatory, and businesses must use their best endeavours to ensure people aged 16 years and over check in (including staff). This enables ACT Health to quickly access patron information to alert people who may have been in contact with a person with COVID-19, if required.

The community is being reminded to continue to follow the health advice to help to keep our community safe. As we move through this next stage of the pandemic, we ask Canberrans to:

- Physically distance from other groups whenever possible
- Continue good hand and respiratory hygiene
- Use the Check In CBR app to check in when out and about
- Stay home if unwell and get tested if experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms
- Monitor travel advice
- Book a COVID-19 vaccination when eligible to protect yourself and the community.

## **Conclusion**

The ACT remains well placed in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic with no evidence of community transmission at this time despite a continuing rise in cases in NSW. The ACT's testing rates continue to reflect the epidemiological situation.

The recent increase in locally acquired cases in Australia demonstrates the need for public health restrictions to remain in place as appropriate to the situation to ensure the ACT can respond quickly and effectively to any new cases detected within the community.

With COVID-19 cases recently identified across several states, ACT Health continues to ask Canberrans to reconsider the need for non-essential interstate travel at this time to help to minimise the risk of COVID-19 entering the ACT. Canberrans should not travel to areas which are under stay-at-home or quarantine requirements. ACT Health will continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation in all jurisdictions very closely and will put in place further directions if required in order to keep our community safe.

The continuing rise in cases nationally and overseas demonstrates the need for all jurisdictions in Australia to maintain a robust quarantine program for returning international travellers and a level of public health restrictions in response to COVID-19.

The ACT, along with all jurisdictions, continues to focus on strong suppression to minimise community transmission of the virus, consistent with the first phase of the four-step National Plan to transition Australia's National COVID-19 Response. As agreed by National Cabinet, the transition between phases will be based on Australia reaching key vaccination thresholds. As highlighted earlier, vaccination coverage in the ACT vaccination is progressing very well, with the number of vaccination bookings growing as Commonwealth supply of vaccine to the ACT Government increases.

Importantly, the ACT's focus remains on early detection of new cases; preparedness to thoroughly investigate cases, clusters and outbreaks and ensure our workforce is equipped to surge when required; and public messaging to businesses and the community about the importance of continuing to practise COVID safe behaviours and to book an appointment to get vaccinated when eligible. COVID-normal restrictions remain in place and are an important component in reducing the risk of virus transmission in the ACT.

## **Recommendation**

As Chief Health Officer, I advise the Minister for Health that the public health emergency declaration should be extended for a further 90 days due to the public health risk posed by COVID-19. I advise that the risk of COVID-19 is sufficient to justify maintaining public health control measures to safeguard against a resurgence of COVID-19 cases in the ACT and to ensure the ACT can adequately respond to the potential of new outbreaks. This recommendation is consistent with that of other Australian jurisdictions which are maintaining emergency status or similar at this time and focusing on suppression with a goal of no community transmission.