

CORONAVIRUS

Paul Castles continues to wait for Covid vaccination team to visit his disability group home

A man can't understand why his brother, who lives in a disability group home, still hasn't been visited by a Covid vaccination team.

Rob Inglis & [Annie McCann](#), Mercury

 Subscriber only | July 20, 2021 5:00am

Gerard Castles says he can't understand why the disability group home in which his brother, Paul, lives still hasn't been visited by a Covid-19 vaccination team.

Disability care residents and staff fall under Phase 1a of Australia's Covid-19 vaccination rollout and were supposed to have been vaccinated within six weeks of the start of the rollout in mid-February.


Five months later, however, there are still many people living in disability accommodation who are yet to receive the jab through Commonwealth in-reach services, despite some people with disability being at greater risk of becoming very sick if they contract the virus.

Mr Castles said his brother, who has Down syndrome, is too anxious to leave the Kingston group home he occupies along with another resident, and so can't be taken to a vaccination clinic.

"He's the epitome of someone who relies on the rest of society for care," Mr Castles said.

"(It's) 2021 and we can't get someone to go out and see people in their homes (to) vaccinate them. I cannot understand what the (obstacle) is ... other than that it's more incompetence around the vaccine rollout."



 Gerard Castles visits his brother Paul Castles at Kingston.
Picture Chris Kidd

Despite GP in-reach services – co-ordinated by Primary Health Networks – being available to people living in disability care who want to receive the vaccine, Mr Castles said he had spoken to Paul's GP, who had told him she wasn't authorised to visit the group home to deliver the jab.

Mr Castles also expressed his disappointment that national cabinet had decided against making it mandatory for disability care workers to get the Covid jab, as is required of aged care workers.


"I actually think this is a disaster waiting to happen and the government will have blood on their hands ..." he said.

Kate MacRae, chief executive of Able Australia, which operates the group home where Paul Castles lives, said she was concerned about how slow the vaccine rollout had been in Tasmanian disability care settings.

"At last count, the NDIS Minister (Linda Reynolds) stated 46.5 per cent of Tasmanian NDIS participants living in disability accommodation had received at least one dose of the vaccine ..." she said.

"This is just unacceptable."



 NDIS Minister Linda Reynolds. (Photo by Sam Mooy/Getty Images)

Coastal Residential Services chief executive Dee-Anne Kapene said the Burnie disability provider had pushed hard for workers and NDIS participants to get their jobs as soon as possible.

Ms Kapene was hopeful the government would mandate for disability workers to have their first dose by October 31 in collaboration with AHPPC.

“The government mandated it in the aged care sector – the cohort we deal with in the disability sector is also ageing,” she said.

A federal Health Department spokesperson said more than 14,700 NDIS participants in accommodation settings nationally had received at least one dose of the vaccine, out of approximately 27,000 participants eligible under Phase 1a.

“Significant work has been undertaken to increase vaccination pathways and to support people with disability to access vaccination in a setting that is appropriate to their needs and preferences,” the spokesperson said.