PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Inquiry into Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Written Question on Notice, 6 August 2021

PDR Number: IQ21-000183

Minutes of Australian Health Protection Principal Committee

Written

Senator: Katy Gallagher

Question:

Noting the Administrative Appeals Tribunal determination of 5 August 2021 in Rex V. Scott:

4. Please provide minutes of all meetings of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) since the establishment of National Cabinet.

   (Senate Select Committee on COVID-19: QON document reference #284).

Answer:

Disclosure of the minutes would, or might reasonably be expected to, damage relations between the Commonwealth and the States.

The minutes of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) meetings contain material that was prepared for the purpose of informing the National Cabinet, and disclosure would reveal the deliberations of National Cabinet. The Government maintains the view that deliberations of National Cabinet should remain confidential. This is consistent with longstanding practice on Cabinet confidentiality.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Inquiry into Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Written Question on Notice, 6 August 2021

PDR Number: IQ21-000193

Advice to Government on the use of Rapid COVID Antigen tests in Australia

Written

Senator: Katy Gallagher

Question:

Rapid tests:

3. Please provide all advice to government regarding the use of rapid tests in Australia, including advice relating to why the tests have yet to be implemented across Australia.

Answer:

On 23 August 2021, the Public Health Laboratory Network (PHLN) and the Communicable Diseases Network Australia (CDNA) (expert standing committees of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee) published a revised joint statement on the use of rapid antigen tests (RATs). The Statement advises that, while less sensitive than PCR, RAT kits are able provide results for SARS-CoV-2 testing at the point-of-care (or near person care), with a rapid turn-around time (15 – 30 minutes) to result. The PHLN and CDNA joint statement on SARS-CoV-2 rapid antigen tests can be found at: www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/phln-and-cdna-joint-statement-on-sars-cov-2-rapid-antigen-tests#_blank.

In addition, the implementation of rapid antigen testing must also be considered in line with the Testing Framework for COVID-19 in Australia, which describes the epidemiological contexts in which rapid antigen tests may be appropriate for use. The decision for which testing approach is preferred is the responsibility jurisdictional public health authorities. The Testing Framework for COVID-19 in Australia can be found at: www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-framework-for-covid-19-in-australia.

The Australian Government also continues to monitor and explore alternative testing technology and strategies to ensure Australia can sustain response activities and achieve maximal public health benefit, especially during outbreaks and in the context of reopening Australia. With the global circulation of more infectious variants of SARS-CoV-2 this consideration has never been more critical.

As a result, the Department of Health is initially making RAT kits available to a variety of aged care services in high-risk local government areas of concern across New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria. The initial focus aims to help protect our most vulnerable citizens from COVID-19. For more information please visit the Department's website at: www.health.gov.au/news/rapid-antigen-testing-in-aged-care.

To support the safe use of rapid antigen self-tests and following extensive consultation, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has made a new regulation (Specification) on 1 October 2021 that will allow companies to formally apply for TGA regulatory approval after 1 October to legally supply their self-tests for use at home in Australia after 1 November 2021.

This is an important step in supporting the National Plan to transition Australia's National COVID-19 Response and aligns with the timeframe where it is expected that approximately 70 per cent of Australians will be double vaccinated.

Individual tests will require TGA approval and inclusion in the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG) as for all other testing kits. As at 15 October 2021 the TGA has registered five rapid antigen self-tests on the ARTG.