

COVID-19 Response

Our role in PPE distribution



Overview

WA Primary Health Alliance (WAPHA) acknowledges the uncertainty and concern within general practices regarding the supply and distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE) at this difficult time.

We have encountered significant logistics and supply challenges and have continued to escalate this matter to the Australian Government Department of Health, including seeking clarification on stock allocations and eligibility criteria.

Our role in PPE distribution

WAPHA's role in the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) during the COVID-19 pandemic is to:

- Provide a mechanism for eligible Western Australian general practices, GP Respiratory Clinics, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and pharmacies to submit requests for PPE to the National Medical Stockpile (NMS);
- Review and validate those requests to ensure eligibility is in line with Australian Government Department of Health guidance; and
- Coordinate the distribution of requests, noting this will be taken over by a national distributor in early 2022.

WAPHA, via the NMS, is not the primary source of PPE for all primary care providers as detailed below.

Eligibility and availability of PPE

On 29 October 2021, the Australian Government announced the \$180 million Living with COVID-19 Primary Care Package to further strengthen and support the health system as high vaccination levels allowed Australia to open up.

Under the existing Australian Government Department of Health PPE guidelines, [Tranche 4 guidance for supply](#) practices can only access PPE where there is no local supply available commercially or from a State or Territory government scheme, where practices have a population which may be more likely to have been exposed to the novel coronavirus and/or have unusual numbers of patients presenting with respiratory symptoms.

While this arrangement continues, an expanded program provides comprehensive PPE bundles that are intended to support approximately four weeks of COVID positive patient consultations per clinical staff member (based on the numbers of GPs, nurses, pharmacists working at the practice) i.e., 40 patient consultations – 20 patients with two consultations each.

Due to Australian Government Department of Health requirements and guidelines, practices which have formally advised WAPHA of their intent to see COVID positive patients via face-to-face consultations, and those who meet other criteria outlined below, will have access to PPE bundles, ordering via WAPHA, from the NMS.

Practitioner type	Contents of bundle	Available until
<p>GPs, ACCHSs, and GPRCs willing to treat COVID positive patients face to face</p>	<p>P2/N95 respirators, goggles/face shields, gowns, gloves, surgical masks, hand sanitiser</p>	<p>30 June 2022</p>
<p>ACCHSs and rural and remote GPs willing to treat COVID positive patients virtually and respiratory patients face-to-face, where workforce capacity is limited AND the GP is serving the community for most, or all, health needs</p>		
<p>GPs willing to see respiratory patients face to face and COVID positive patients virtually</p>	<p>P2/N95 respirators, goggles, face shields</p>	<p>31 March 2022</p>
<p>Pharmacists administering COVID-19 vaccinations</p>	<p>P2/N95 respirators, a goggle/face shield</p>	<p>31 March 2022</p>
<p>Clinicians managing COVID positive patients only</p>	<p>Pulse oximeters</p>	

Please note, items and quantities are subject to change by the NMS at any time.

WAPHA does not control the selection of PPE, with items allocated from the NMS subject to change including respirators and surgical masks.

WAPHA cannot guarantee supply of the same make and size of masks at each delivery, or if masks supplied to a practice will be available in quantities commercially. The NMS is unable to provide information in advance of a delivery on the make and sizes of masks a practice will receive.

Therefore, practices may need to fit test multiple makes of masks to ensure they are able to source adequate supplies that meet fit requirements for their clinicians and staff.

Fit testing

Australian Government Department of Health policy does not resource fit testing of PPE for general practices and does not specifically fund PHNs to do so. WAPHA cannot sustain fit testing at no cost to all practices seeking a service.

This follows a limited program initiated by WAPHA for practices which responded to our initial survey confirming they would see COVID-19 positive patients face to face; or practices that requested PPE in their management of respiratory patients face to face. Priority for the fit testing resources were to ensure a spread of availability across Perth, regional and remote areas and AMSs. It is anticipated the current arrangement will fit test about 130 practices.

Advocacy

WAPHA is committed to providing advice and support to general practice, often above and beyond what we have been directly funded to do. This includes listening to general practice's concerns and conveying these to the Australian Government Department of Health and the WA Department of Health. We also collaborate closely with medical colleges and GP member organisations in support of their advocacy efforts.

Some of the matters we have advocated on recently include escalating the multiple enquiries regarding the delivery date of general practice PPE orders placed in December 2021, raising this at the highest level within the Australian Government and WA Departments of Health.

In WA's current environment of increasing community spread of COVID-19, we understand that any general practice may, unknowingly or otherwise, see COVID positive patients face to face during a community outbreak. Unfortunately, there have been limitations on what we can achieve to support those practices. For example, we were not approved to release N95 masks beyond the eligible group outlined above or to offer further fit testing.

However, following advocacy from PHN CEOs, the Australian Government Department of Health has confirmed additional eligibility criteria for emergency provision of PPE from the NMS. This will mean more practices can access PPE bundles based on thorough assessment by their PHN, provided there is no local supply available commercially or from another State scheme and they have not already accessed Living with COVID PPE bundles.

Questions and more information

Practices should continue to send PPE enquiries to PPEresponse@wapha.org.au
General enquiries about COVID-19 support should be directed to practice.assist@wapha.org.au

We acknowledge and appreciate your ongoing commitment to delivering quality primary care in this challenging environment and we will continue to do everything within our Australian Government mandate to support you to do so.

Learne Durrington



Chief Executive Officer
11 February 2022