

2.3 IMMUNISATION ADVOCACY

(Author:File No.)

Responsible Director: Julie Salomon

RECOMMENDATION*That Council:*

- 1. Notes the important work the Immunisation Program does within the community as a simple, safe and effective way of protecting people against harmful diseases before they come into contact with them thus reducing the spread of preventable disease.*
- 2. Advocates to the Victorian Minister for Health, the Hon. Jenny Mikakos to increase the level of State funding subsidies to local government immunisation services in line with the increasing costs of immunisation.*
- 3. Authorises officers to engage with other immunisation agencies in a collective advocacy campaign.*

INTRODUCTION

In Victoria, immunisation services are a function of local government according to the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008(PHWA), Part 3, Division 3, s.24. (Annex 2). This section states *'the function of every council under this Act is to seek to protect, improve and promote public health and wellbeing within the municipal district by- (f) co-ordinating and providing immunisation services to children living or being educated within the municipal district;'*

BACKGROUND

Local Government in Victoria has historically played an important role in delivering immunisation services to the Victorian public. It currently provides approximately 45 percent of all immunisation encounters for children aged two months to four years of age given in Victoria, and contributes significantly to raising the importance of immunisation in local communities. Local Government administers approximately 90 per cent of immunisations due at school age.

DISCUSSION

Subsidies for local government immunisation services have not been increased since 2005 other than yearly CPI increases. Changes of income have solely been dependant on the type and number of vaccinations required by the changes in the immunisation program as set by the National

Immunisation Program. This program is subject to change without significant notice from the Department of Health.

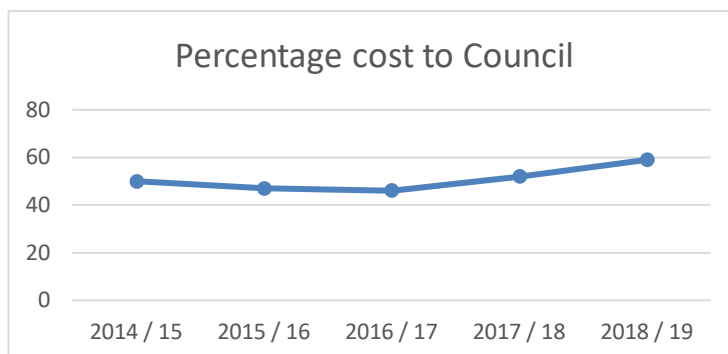
The changing nature of immunisation over recent years has placed increased financial burden on local governments. These changes include:

- No increase in payments relative to increasing service costs and demands;
- Introduction of “No Jab No Pay” and “No Jab No Play” policies with no increase to per encounter payment;
- Significant and regular changes to the secondary school cohort immunisations including catch up programs for HPV, Boostrix and Meningococcal CV ACWY;
- Introduction of whole of life Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) which has increased the administrative load for Councils; and
- Increased community demand for overseas / complex catch up schedules.

Furthermore, community expectations have increased in relation to:

- access to information and education;
- access to immunisation sessions;
- access to reports that are now required for pre-school entry, school entry, tertiary study /placement and employment; and
- Media reports relating to “anti vaxers” and disease outbreaks such as Influenza and Measles.

The changes in Council subsidy for the provision of the Monash Immunisation Program can be seen in the following figures:



The obvious trend is upward and represents a cost shift to Council. The Monash immunisation service continues to be more innovative with the limited resources provided to ensure it continues to meet the needs and expectations of the local community. In this rate capped environment, cost shifting to Local Government should not impact a highly trusted and accessible service for the community.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Nil

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Currently the range of services offered cover the life span birth to the elderly with a particular focus on our infant program and secondary school program. The service is currently also offered to parents, grandparents and vulnerable groups within our community. This is especially prevalent with our influenza program which we offer free of charge to eligible cohorts.

The public health consequences of falling immunisation rates have the potential to be serious within our community particularly given our demographic. A large percentage of our residents were born overseas and travel often to countries and regions where the diseases we vaccinate against are prevalent. These diseases whilst rarely seen in Australia could and will become more common with our community if our service cannot maintain the high level to which it currently functions. Falling immunisation rates in the setting of a frequent travelling community can cause significant public health risks.

The Monash council immunisation service is accessed regularly to provide education, advice and recommendations relating to immunisation. These requests come not only from our residents but also other stakeholders such as schools, clinics, employees and the Australian Immunisation Register. The community trusts that we can meet their evolving needs to not only immunise but also answer their queries and concerns. The service has an increasing role to play in vaccine recording and data cleansing in the setting of “No Jab No Pay” and “No Jab No Play”.

HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS

There are no human rights considerations for this advocacy.

CONSULTATION

Consultation not required for this advocacy.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Nil

CONCLUSION

This report highlights the important work the Immunisation Program does within the community as a simple, safe and effective way of protecting people against harmful diseases before they come into contact with them thus reducing the spread of preventable diseases. This advocacy is to ensure that this program is adequately resourced to support this health prevention role and the costs are not transferred to Council and rate payers.