

Media Release

1 December 2021

CANBERRA'S MOST VULNERABLE CARING FOR THE COMMUNITY AND GETTING VACCINATED

Many of the Territory's most vulnerable residents have taken steps to protect themselves, their family, friends and the community by getting COVID vaccinated at the Directions Health outreach service .

"Canberrans have shown how committed they are to doing the right thing and getting vaccinated," Directions Health Services CEO, Bronwyn Hendry said. "Today, the vaccination rate in our city stands at over 95 per cent.

"However, accessing the vaccination has been more challenging for some, particularly those Canberrans who don't regularly visit a doctor or face other barriers, like transport issues.

"Public housing tenants are particularly vulnerable to a COVID outbreak as they live in close proximity, may have found staying informed about precautions difficult, and could have poorer health and outcomes.

"Since we began administering COVID vaccinations through our PAT outreach service at public housing sites across the city, take-up has been exceptional and it has been driven by a very real feeling of responsibility towards each other."

Jane* is double vaccinated now because Directions was a friendly, supportive face, on the ground, in her local community.

"One of our clinics proved key for Jane," Ms. Hendry said.

Collaborating with partners from Housing ACT and Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation and Advocacy (CAHMA), the Directions' primary health care team arrived in Jane's neighbourhood for a pop-up car park COVID-19 clinic.

"Door knocking, posters, and text messages had alerted the local community to the opportunity and a busy round of vaccinations was playing out when our nurses met Jane," Ms. Hendry said. "She knew it was important she was jabbed but her long-held phobia of needles had stopped her three times previously."

With the Directions Health team holding her hand, Jane relaxed enough to receive her first dose.

Her second dose came with much more confidence, where she told nurses of her 17-year-old son who was unmotivated by the call to be vaccinated.

With Jane's guidance, the Directions Health team negotiated to meet her son outside the family's home. Four teens in total came out of the house on that day, the missing pieces in this family's contribution to Canberra vaccination success.

Media Release

But Jane's influence was not over yet. She made it known that five other families nearby had not yet been vaccinated and were keen to be. Jane felt the Directions Health approach might suit her friends.

All were from non-English speaking backgrounds and had expressed hesitancy and confusion at engaging with the wider vaccination process. Jane offered to approach these families and make arrangements.

"She contacted and spoke with her friends about vaccination through the Directions outreach service and five more families were vaccinated," Ms Hendry revealed.

"Clients have told us how grateful they were to see us show up and make vaccinations available to them where they live. 'We often feel forgotten,' they tell us. Without vaccinations through PAT, our clients tell us they would not now be vaccinated."

As one client said: "I wasn't going to worry about getting vaxxed, but you are right here so I guess I'll get it done."

"It was going to cost me \$20 to get a taxi to the vaccination clinic and I don't have \$20 to spare," another client shared.

"While some of our clients were aware of the free bus travel available to vaccination centres, they were fearful of contracting the virus on public transport," Ms Hendry explained.

"Relationships, working in community, and being nimble have been key to our contribution to Canberra's world-leading pandemic response and incredible vaccination rate."

*Name changed.

Media Contact: Bronwyn Hendry 0417 827 776