

## Frustration over government's non-use of CSO infrastructure

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Australia's full-line pharmaceutical wholesalers remain 'frustrated' over their lack of involvement in the rollout of the COVID-19 national immunisation program.



API's Richard Vincent is the chair of the National Pharmaceutical Services Association (NPSA)

He told BioPharmaDispatch, "Our core point is that you have got an infrastructure that the government pays for and is invested in for another four years. And the health minister yesterday reinforced his confidence in the NPSA and the CSO [Community Service Obligation] wholesalers, but then when it comes to the logistics around administering a vaccine, we are not in the process."

The federal government appointed DHL and Linfox to distribute the COVID-19 vaccines after a limited tender. It has not involved the NPSA wholesalers who it directly supports with over \$200 million every year through the CSO.

"We did not tender the vaccine itself so there is no logic in tendering the companies that are capable of supporting it," he said.

"If you want a high-performance outcome, you need the capability to match it. We have got logistics expertise that is just not being utilised to rollout the COVID vaccination. It is more than frustrating and I find it a little bit incredible that we have not been able to resolve that to this point. To balance that, I think Pfizer has shown great wisdom in coming back to CSO wholesalers. Obviously, we appreciate that and I think it sends a strong message with now the vast majority of all products going through CSO system."

Mr Vincent said the CSO wholesalers are still in discussion with the government about their potential

involvement in the vaccine rollout but that "it feels like it is not gathering enough momentum."

"The Guild is very supportive at the moment and I think it will come to a head once they have the 4,000 participating pharmacies involved in the rollout. When you get down to the challenge of delivering vaccines to these 4,000 pharmacies, I think that is when we might see a change in thinking."

He said the sector was reassured by recent comments from health minister Greg Hunt in which he "talked about the value we add" and the government's investment in another four years of the CSO.

"We are also very conscious of the money has been put aside in the Federal Budget for COVID-19 vaccine distribution, which is \$234 million over two year period. You put that in perspective as an over and above investment to the more then \$200 million the government invests every year in the CSO. That is more than double that for a single product.

"We welcome the government involving community pharmacy in the rollout and the Guild's support for that being delivered through the CSO wholesalers. We are just waiting for the phone call," added Mr Vincent.