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Media release

500 LIVES AND \$530 MILLION COULD BE SAVED ANNUALLY BY BOOSTING FLU VACCINATION RATES

About 500 lives and at least \$530 million could be saved annually in New South Wales if just 55 per cent of under-65s had an influenza vaccination, an updated study by the Productivity and Equality Commission has found.

The *Boosting the NSW influenza vaccination rate* paper identified at least \$530 million in economic benefits each year from more flu shots, and potentially up to \$1.4 billion.

Benefits come from avoiding millions of lost work hours and thousands of flu-related hospitalisations and GP consultations, and saving more healthy years of life for NSW residents.

NSW Productivity and Equality Commissioner Peter Achterstraat AM said: “An additional two million vaccinations of people under 65 could give us a chance to achieve herd immunity against the flu and deliver an economic benefit of at least \$260 for each extra vaccinated person.”

“The savings and economic benefits outweigh the cost of delivering more vaccinations, which is estimated to be around \$42 per person when administered in a mass-vaccination setting.”

Flu vaccination rates dropped in New South Wales in 2023, compared with 2022. The 2023 influenza season saw more than 104,000 cases reported across New South Wales, compared with an annual average of around 45,000 cases over the previous decade.

Vaccination coverage rates have lagged other states over the past few years. For example, about 30 people out of every 100 are vaccinated against the flu in New South Wales, compared with about 33 in Victoria, 34 in South Australia, and 39 in the ACT.

Mr Achterstraat said the vaccine was effective, saved lives and limited the economic cost of influenza.

“There is a role for everyone in boosting vaccination rates to both save lives and help drive greater productivity – this includes businesses, governments, schools, and families.”

The Commissioner is encouraging workplaces to consider initiatives and programs that could boost vaccination rates among staff. This could help improve productivity in workplaces by saving work time that would otherwise be lost to illness or caring for children who are unwell with the flu.

“Just one worker diagnosed with the flu could lose three to six workdays, on average, which could be at least \$900 worth of work time,” Mr Achterstraat said.

The NSW Productivity and Equality Commission’s *Boosting the NSW influenza vaccination rate* paper can be read here: <https://www.productivity.nsw.gov.au/2024-edition-boosting-the-NSW-influenza-vaccination-rate>