



COVID-19 Industry Spotlight: **Keeping Aged Care Workers Safe**

The world of work continues to evolve – and so too do the needs of employees. Today, in an age when COVID-19 is part of everyday life, employee safety and wellbeing has never been more critical. In this Industry Spotlight, we look at how these needs are being addressed in the Aged Care industry.

The impact of COVID-19 on the Aged Care industry

Taken as a whole, the Aged Care industry has been heavily impacted by COVID-19. Examining the economic impact of the coronavirus on the Aged Care industry, a report by industry research company IBISWorld¹ indicates that the ‘residential aged care’ subdivision has faced the most significant disruption.

The report outlined why aged care residential facilities are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 outbreaks, and how staff are expected to respond to minimise risk for themselves and residents. Indeed, in July the National Cabinet announced that by mid-September 2021, all residential aged care workers must have at least the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. Government funding was announced in March 2020 to educate and train aged care workers in infection control, and to enable aged care operators to hire additional nurses and workers.

Adding to the complexities of managing COVID-19 in the workplace are shortages of preventative medical supplies, such as face masks and hand sanitiser – although in many cases these shortages have eased.

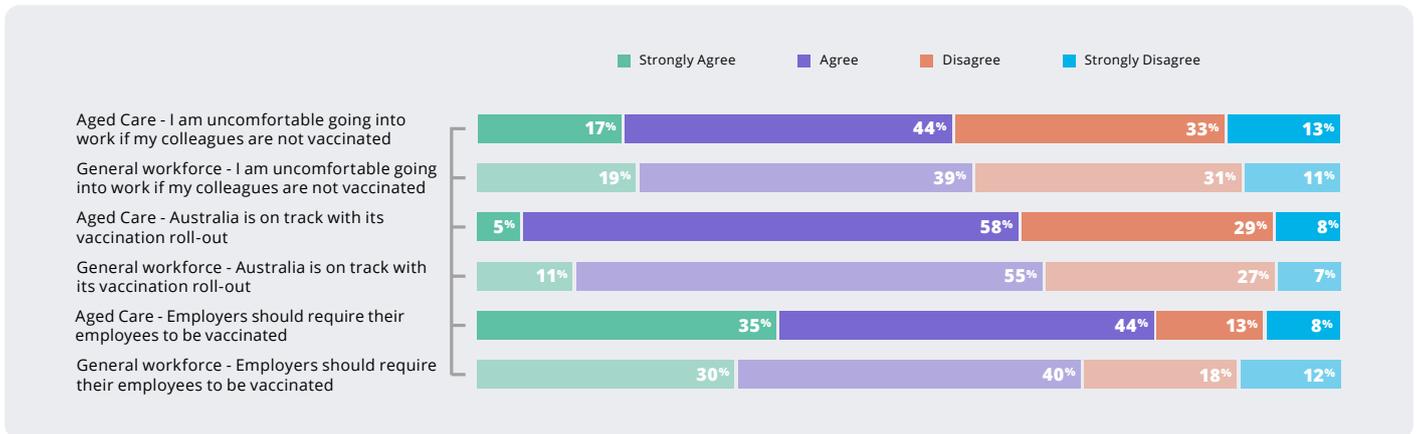
Access the Federal Government’s website for news, advice and resources for aged care providers [here](#).

Taking the pulse of Aged Care industry workers

While Government regulations continue to evolve, it’s worth considering employee sentiment – especially when it comes to sensitive areas like vaccinations. ELMO’s quarterly [Employee Sentiment Index](#) provides insights into the attitudes, actions and concerns of employees. On the following page are some relevant datapoints from Q3 (July-September 2021) for both the general Australian workforce and those in the Aged Care industry.

Worker vaccine sentiment²

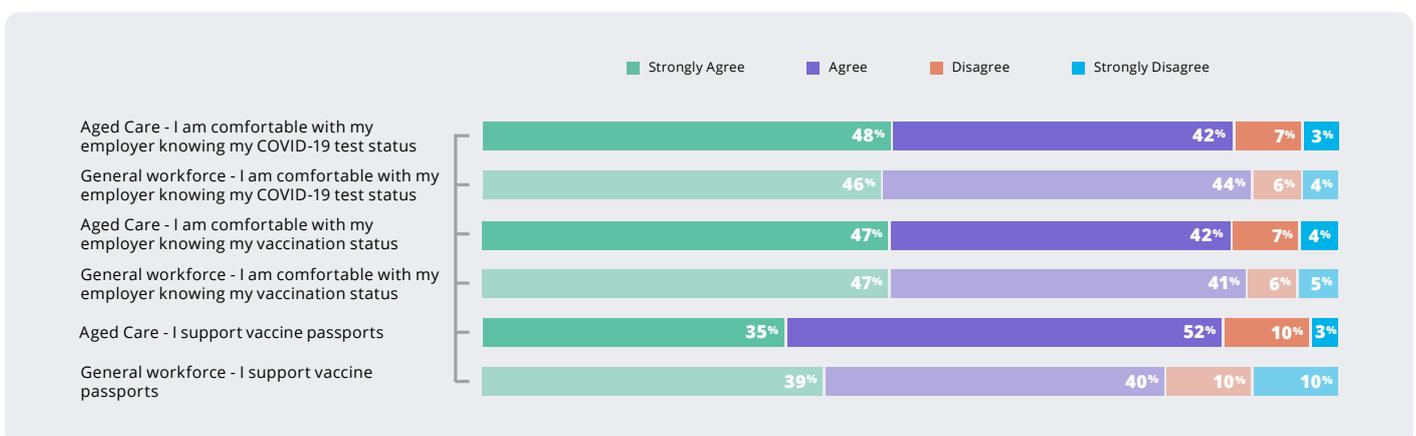
Thinking about the vaccines for COVID-19, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (Comparison of Aged Care industry workers with all Australian workers)



The latest round of lockdowns may be behind **soaring support for employers requiring their employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19**, with 70% of Australian workers either strongly agreeing or agreeing with this (up from 62% in Q2). Comparatively, 79% of Aged Care industry workers feel the same way.

In a looming challenge for employers preparing to welcome back workers, the **proportion of workers uncomfortable working alongside unvaccinated colleagues has climbed to 58%**. This is a 14-point rise from Q2. In the Aged Care industry, this figure sits slightly higher at 61%.

The largest rise has been seen in perceptions of Australia’s vaccination roll-out with **two thirds (66%) of workers believing Australia is on track with its vaccination roll-out**. This is up significantly from Q2 (41%). This figure is significantly higher in the Aged Care industry, with 79% of workers in that sector feeling the same way.



In reference to the second graph on the previous page, and on trend with growing support for mandatory vaccinations in the workplace, **Australians are generally comfortable with their employer knowing their COVID-19 vaccination and test status, and this is also reflected in the Aged Care industry.** Employers keeping track of vaccination status is supported by 88% of Australian workers (89% of Aged Care workers) while knowledge of test status is supported by 90% of Australian workers (90% of Aged Care workers).

Vaccination passports have also been welcomed by Australian workers, with four in five (79%) Australian workers supporting vaccine passports. This is even more strongly supported by those in the Aged Care industry (87%).

Why does it matter? An employer's duty of care

Wellbeing and safety form a critical part of the employee / employer relationship. Despite the disruption of the past 18 months, organisations need to continue operating without jeopardising the wellbeing and safety of their employees – that's a fundamental, legal employer responsibility.

Safe Work Australia makes this clear on their [website](#):

“Employers have a duty under the model Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws to eliminate, or if that is not reasonably practicable, minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace.”

In addition to continuing to apply COVID-19 control measures such as physical distancing, QR code check-ins, good hygiene, regular cleaning and ensuring employees do not attend work if they are unwell, employers also play a critical role in reinforcing the importance of vaccinations. The Safe Work Australia website adds:

“The Australian Government is committed to providing all Australians with access to free, safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines. While the Government aims to have as many Australians as possible choose to be vaccinated, receiving a vaccination is voluntary. You can encourage your workers to get a COVID-19 vaccination, if they are able to.”³

As of August 2021, the Federal and State Governments have refused to enforce vaccinations for the public and sectors not already covered by existing public health orders, like hotel quarantine, residential aged care workers, teachers and childcare workers, and more recently, construction workers in some states.

The Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO) has introduced a four-tier system to help business leaders determine COVID-19 related risks in their industry (see following page).⁴

³. Read more about vaccinations on the Department of Health website: <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines>
⁴. “New system: Four tiers to guide businesses on mandatory vaccinations”, 12 August, ‘Sydney Morning Herald’

The four tiers of work in the FWO advice:

- **Tier 1 work**, where employees are required as part of their duties to interact with people with an increased risk of being infected with coronavirus (for example, employees working in hotel quarantine or border control).
- **Tier 2 work**, where employees are required to have close contact with people who are particularly vulnerable to the health impacts of coronavirus (for example, employees working in health care or aged care).
- **Tier 3 work**, where there is interaction or likely interaction between employees and other people such as customers, other employees or the public in the normal course of employment (for example, stores providing essential goods and services).
- **Tier 4 work**, where employees have minimal face-to-face interaction as part of their normal employment duties (for example, where they are working from home).

For the latest updates from the FWO, review their [guide to the coronavirus and Australian workplace laws](#).

The responsibility will fall to individual businesses to prove their in-house vaccine mandates are legally appropriate. A key question to ask is whether mandating vaccinations is a lawful and reasonable directive. One doesn't necessarily cancel out the other. For example, mandating vaccinations may not be unlawful but is it reasonable – especially if, for example, there are shortages of vaccinations available?

Ultimately, employers need to ensure that regardless of whether the COVID-19 vaccine is made mandatory for their industry, they follow a structured risk-based approach. A risk-based approach will also help to minimise potential discrimination risks for businesses with employees who oppose vaccinations on medical, religious or ethical grounds.

If an employer is unsure if their industry or business meets the criteria set out above, always seek legal advice.

COVID-19 and the employee experience (EX)

Almost as important as an employer's duty of care is the EX. COVID-19 has forced organisations in all sectors to rethink how they approach the EX. Where, when and how work is undertaken has undergone significant change over the past 18 months and it's likely these upheavals will change working life forever.

The EX covers what people encounter and observe over the course of their tenure at their organisation, from 'hire to retire'. It covers the environment they work in, the tools they use, the opportunities for growth and development they receive, and their relationships with peers and managers.

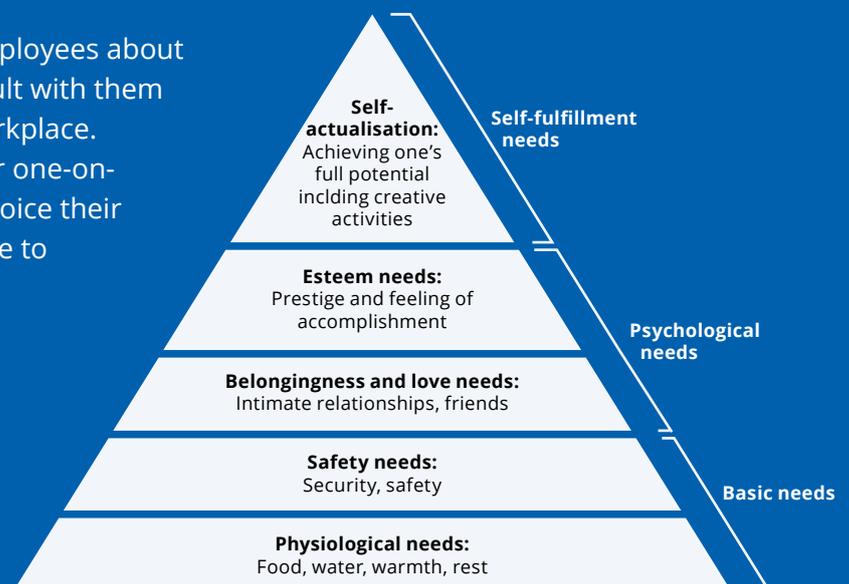
Looking ahead, the EX will cover an even broader spectrum. Indeed, HR observer Josh Bersin says the EX now "covers everything".⁵ That means even elements once thought to be beyond the scope of employers need to be included. To demonstrate this, consider the following questions that all employees are grappling with every day – the common theme is wellbeing and safety:

- Is it safe to go to work today and if so what mode of transport will I use?
- Will my health be jeopardised by being amongst my colleagues, some of whom are unvaccinated?
- What information about my vaccination status or COVID-19 testing updates do I need to supply to my employer to prove I am able to work?
- Wherever I undertake my work from, do I have space, tools and bandwidth to work well?
- Will my manager check in with me and help me succeed when everyone around me is worried, a little overworked, and trying to make things better?

Prioritising wellbeing and safety

As those questions demonstrate, wellbeing and safety are top priorities – but then again, they always have been. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (pictured below) suggested that humans must fulfill their basic physiological and safety needs before moving on to their higher, more advanced needs such as feelings of prestige and pride in achievements and reaching one's full potential.

It's important to not only educate employees about COVID-19 vaccinations but also consult with them about safety and wellbeing in the workplace. Gather feedback, provide channels or one-on-one opportunities for employees to voice their concerns, and have processes in place to handle queries.



A helping hand: ELMO COVIDsecure

While the country is moving ahead with the vaccine roll-out, it's important that employers have the tools required to manage COVID-19 in the workplace.

For those organisations that identify a need to monitor vaccination status or require regular COVID-19 testing for employees, [ELMO COVIDsecure](#) may be the answer. COVIDsecure supports businesses by automating record-keeping relating to COVID-19 testing and tracking the vaccination status of their workforce.

With COVIDsecure, employees can submit their own records of their COVID-19 vaccination and/or test results in a single platform with strict secure access and control measures. Just as critically, COVID-19 HR policies can be customised to suit your organisation's unique needs, with rapid deployment capabilities and in-built acknowledgement tracking to help ensure compliance obligations are being met.

In addition, employers have the ability to:

- Capture vaccination or test status for the entire or targeted areas of the business drilling down into areas such as location, department and even role.
- Configure periodic expiry alerts so they can be notified when an employee is due to update their vaccination or test status. The alert functionality is particularly useful for workers who could be required by government regulation to submit for testing at regular intervals.
- Utilise a powerful dashboard with real-time visualisations to track key metrics, enabling managers and leaders to make smarter decisions and take a proactive approach to mitigating COVID-19 risk.
- Access a library of COVID-19 HR policy templates which are customisable, assisting businesses looking for advice and material to operate in a COVID-safe manner.

To be able to operate safely and in line with Government regulations it's crucial to have the right tools at your disposal. To find out how ELMO COVIDsecure can help your business or to request a demo, contact us [here](#).

How ELMO can help?

ELMO Software (ASX:ELO) is a cloud-based solution that helps thousands of organisations across Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom to effectively manage their people, process and pay. ELMO solutions span the entire employee lifecycle from 'hire to retire'. They can be used together or stand-alone, and are configurable according to an organisation's unique processes and workflows. Automate and streamline your operations to reduce costs, increase efficiency and bolster productivity.

For further information:

[Contact us](#)

Disclaimer: This document contains general information and is not intended to constitute legal advice. If you need legal advice, we recommend you speak to a qualified lawyer.

