**Special Series: Living with COVID**

**George Taleporos gets vaccinated without leaving the house, and is joined by Disability Liaison Officer, Belinda Ross.**

**George:** Hi, and welcome to Reasonable and Necessary, Australia’s premier series on everything you ever wanted to know about the National Disability Insurance Scheme, brought to you by the Summer Foundation. I’m your host, Doctor George Taleporos, and in this episode of our special series on COVID-19, I get vaccinated without even leaving the house. And I speak to the Disability Liaison Officer who made it possible. Check it out.

**Nurse:** Hello, how are you?

**Nurse:** How did you feel after your second dose?

**George:** Yeah, I haven’t had any side effects from either dose.

**Nurse:** Yeah. That’s excellent. So your most common side effects with the Pfizer is just a bit of a sore arm, right?

**George:** Yeah.

**Nurse:** You might feel a little bit headachy, fevers, chills, muscle pain, and joint pain.

**George:** Yep.

**Nurse:** All right. Are you happy for me to pop Pfizer into your left arm?

**George:** Yeah, yeah.

**Nurse:** Cool. All right.

**George:** That is the smallest needle I’ve ever felt in my life

**Nurse:** Yeah.

**Nurse 2**: She’s good isn’t she, George.

**George:** I’m sure I won’t feel a thing. Are you sure it’s in?

**Nurse:** Yeah. You feeling all good, George?

**George:** I feel great.

**Nurse:** Beautiful. If you have any problems, anything minor, just see your doctor. Anything major, any chest pain or shortness of breath, go to the emergency department.

**George:** I sure will. Thank you.

**Nurse:** All right, no worries. You have a good day.

**George:** Thanks for your help. Bye.

**Nurse:** You're welcome.

**George:** Hey, Belinda, thanks for joining us.

**Belinda:** Oh thanks, George. So lovely to be part of your podcast. Thanks for inviting me.

**George:** Now, you’re the person that arranged my vaccination, aren’t you?

**Belinda:** Yes, I am. It’s so nice to meet you in person. We’ve spoken on the phone many times, which has been lovely.

**George:** Yes, it was a really easy process and I want to tell other people about your service. Now, you’re a Disability Liaison Officer. Can you tell us a bit about your role?

**Belinda:** Thanks, George. Yes, we are Disability Liaison Officers or DLOs. And we knew that during the pandemic, people living with disabilities had trouble accessing their usual health services as well as COVID services, and these roles were created in 2020 to respond to that need. There’s 22 health networks who have a Disability Liaison Officer with them. So often you can call your local hospital and ask to speak to the Disability Liaison Officer and there will be one available to assist you.

**George:** And these roles are across Victoria?

**Belinda:** They are. We have colleagues in Bright, we have them in all our regional areas and also the metro region. And I thought it might be good to add that we all have varying backgrounds. So I’m a social worker and my colleague that I work with is in occupational therapy, but we have nurses and other professions that are available to support people. So it’s really great.

**George:** So can you tell us about some of the barriers that people have to get vaccinated? And how you help people to overcome these barriers?

**Belinda:** Great. Thanks, George. So we know that people have physical barriers. So being able to access a clinic physically or people can be housebound and they may not be able to attend any of the clinics to receive their vaccination. I guess that’s what we’re talking about today. We’ve also found that people have had barriers to accessing information, and that is good, reliable information. So often we are supporting people to link into the public health advice and services that are able to advise them further. We found that while we have access to a number of different types of services, people with different needs equally found the services weren’t quite meeting their needs, so we might have people who might need a low sensory environment. And we have a low sensory clinic in East Ringwood that we refer to.

People who may have, say a needle or medical aversion, so coming to a normal medical treatment is a barrier to them and being able to work with them individually to help them to access a vaccination. And I must say that each call is very individual. And people are the experts in their own needs, and often they’re able to tell us what we need. So we’re able to then work out the right process for them. And it’s been great, we’ve partnered with our health services – so I’m based at Eastern Health – our public health units, our public health networks. So the GPs, our specialist development schools, and state and federal services, to really work together to make the right environment to receive a vaccination. And I’ve been so inspired by that, that’s been a really great thing to be able to do. And to see the commitment that each of these organisations have to improving health outcomes and quality of care for people living with disabilities.

But we’re not finished. We’ve still got a lot of work to go.

**George:** No, we need more people vaccinated and, you know, I really am pleased to hear that you’re, that we have a service here in Victoria that’s very proactive in supporting people to get vaccinated. And that’s really important that we do that in ways, that we do whatever it takes, whether it’s going to someone’s house, or whether it’s about helping them through their needle aversion, by the way, when it comes to needle aversion, I know that some people have… No one likes needles do they? But what I found, in terms of the Covid vaccine, I’ve never felt a needle so small in my life. You hardly even notice it, yeah...

**Belinda:** Oh, look, I’ve certainly had my vaccinations and I can say that as well. And I think that people can talk to their GPs to even minimise the feeling of a needle. They can talk to their GPs whether an Emla cream is right for them, or Emla patch. There’s so many different things that people can do to reduce that, sort of the feeling of having a vaccination. But we do know with needles aversion or needle phobia, this is a real thing, many people have had, experienced this for a long time. Or it might be the first time that someone’s realised that they do have a needle fear. And there are specialist services, there are actually resources that people can use. We’ve got virtual reality systems and so on, but again, it’s very individual for that person. So being able to talk to that person over the phone and working out what’s right for them is really important for us to be able to do that. So again, 1 story, multiple options to find out the right solution for them.

**George:** Yeah, that’s great, because it is a real phobia for some people. And we need to support people through that fear. And I’d like to talk about this fantastic service, which is where people come to your house. Can you tell us a bit about that?

**Belinda:** Yes. So one of the options for people who either cannot leave their house or they’re a carer for somebody and can’t bring that person with them, or they might equally find that being in the home is the right environment to receive their vaccination, we’re able to work with that person to refer them to a service where a nurse can visit them and provide a vaccination.

**George:** And it’s not just 1 nurse, I got 3. What was great was that I didn’t have to even leave the house. Because I’m currently very nervous about being around a vaccination clinic. And especially when people that go and get their vaccines are normally people who are unvaccinated. Yeah. So it was just really, really good to be able to have that service come to me. And they were really friendly and very, very fantastic service.

**Belinda:** It is a great service. And I think the thing that we find is that we can do quite a bit of the work before a nurse visits. And I don’t know if you remember the information we went through before the nurse came, but we do complete quite a great questionnaire with people to make sure that the home is right for them, what the nurses need to consider when visiting, and working out an individual way to attend the home and provide the vaccination for you.

**George:** And in terms of eligibility, did you want to talk us through the criteria?

**Belinda:** I think in simple terms on that, there is a website for people with –

**George:** How do I find that ...?

**Belinda:** Yeah, so when you go onto the booking line, you can actually choose the section that says for people with special needs or a disability. And in there is all of the information that you need to access. But I can provide you with that link that can be put with the podcast.

**George:** Great.

**Belinda:** To help people to –

**Belinda:** Great. But in simple terms, if a person finds that they’re unable to leave the home to receive a vaccination – that may be a physical reason. They might have mental health needs. They might be ill and entering the community has been a challenge before. Or as I said, they may be a carer at home with somebody. And if they identify that they’re unable to access a clinic, then they need to ring or refer to their local service through the website. And we can support them to have a nurse come and visit them. We’re making it very easy.

**George:** Absolutely.

**Belinda:** And we have such positive feedback from our consumers. And I often ask people to text me or just let me know how it went. And I’m really pleased to say that people are – you know, a significant number of people are receiving this service and it’s making a difference for them to receive the vaccination.

**George:** Great. Thanks, Belinda. And thank you for all the great work that you do. And all the nurses, everyone around the country who are helping people to get vaccinated. It’s a great thing that we can all keep ourselves safe from COVID.

**Belinda:** Wonderful. Thanks so much, George, for having me today.

**George:** Have a good day. Bye.

**Belinda:** Thank you. Bye.

**George:** That’s all we have time for on today’s episode of Reasonable and Necessary, brought to you by the Summer Foundation. To be notified of future episodes, don’t forget to hit the subscribe button and the notification bell. Thanks for watching, and until next time, stay well and reasonable.