Push for more transparency in vaccine decisions

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IMMUNISATION providers have called for greater transparency about decision-making on vaccination recommendations and funding.

Members of the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) were asked at a forum in Adelaide last week how Australia could move closer to the US system in which such expert committee meetings were held in public.

GPs and public health officers expressed frustration that major policy decisions were made by ATAGI in a “secretive process”.

“Big decisions are made but it’s not transparent,” one Melbourne GP said. But the public health forum suggested many leading figures in immunisation would also welcome transparency.

Dr Larry Pickering, executive secretary of the US Advisory Committee on Immunisation Practices (ACIP), was invited to address the forum on how ACIP made decisions.

The meetings, he explained, were held in public. “At the last meeting 33,000 people watched on webcast,” he said.

Commercial-in-confidence data from pharmaceutical manufacturing companies were evaluated behind closed doors by ACIP workgroups but ACIP itself was a transparent committee, he said.

ATAGI deputy director Professor Peter Richmond said he was personally trying to come up with ways to meet the clear demand for increased openness.

Dr Kristine Macartney, deputy director (policy) of the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance, said a precedent had been set with ATAGI advice for use of pandemic vaccine being published on the Web and that might indicate progress towards more open communication.