


15 December 2023

Robyn Alders, AO

Honorary Professor
Development Policy Centre

**Crawford School of Public Policy
Australian National University**

COVID-19 Response Inquiry Panel
Commonwealth Government
Canberra, ACT


www.anu.edu.au

Dear Panel Members

Re: Submission to the Commonwealth Government COVID-19 Response Inquiry

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts with you on this important topic.

To introduce myself, I am a veterinarian and an Honorary Professor with the ANU Development Policy Centre, ANU Institute for Climate, Energy and Disaster Solutions, Department of Pathobiology and Population Sciences at the Royal Veterinary College in London and Veterinary Department of Infectious Disease and Global Health, Tufts University. I am also a Senior Consulting Fellow with the Chatham House Global Health Programme. In addition, since September of this year, I am a Commissioner with the Lancet-PPATS Commission on Prevention of Viral Spillover: reducing the risk of pandemics through primary prevention. For over 30 years, I have worked closely with smallholder farmers and producers in sub-Saharan Africa, South and SE Asia and Oceania as a veterinarian, researcher and colleague, with an emphasis on the development of sustainable infectious disease control in animals in resource-limited areas in support of food and nutrition security, income generation, wildlife conservation and public health. My current research and development interests include safe and sustainable food systems, One Health, gender equity and Science Communication.

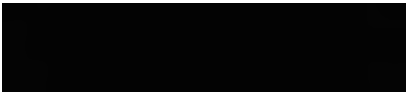
I would like to briefly address two of the key points outlined in your Terms of Reference:

- Key health response measures (for example across COVID-19 vaccinations and treatments, key medical supplies such as personal protective equipment, quarantine facilities, and public health messaging)
R: In relation to the call for local industries to support the COVID-19 public health response, it would be ideal for clear guidance to be made available regarding known and accepted standards. The production of sub-standard alcohol-based hand sanitiser is one example of a waste of time and resources that could have been easily avoided.
- Mechanisms to better target future responses to the needs of particular populations (including across genders, age groups, socio-economic status, geographic location, people with disability, First Nations peoples and communities and people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities).
R: The Australian Government failed to adequately identify and utilise Australians and Australian residents with significant knowledge of and experience with infectious disease prevention and

control in diverse cultural settings. There are eminent Australian medical professionals with considerable international experience in the prevention and control of emerging infectious diseases who were not adequately or appropriately employed during the COVID-19 response. Australian doctors, nurses and social scientists, for instance those who work with *Médecins Sans Frontières*, should have been invited very early on to inform national and state level working groups in relation to viral and landscape epidemiology, effective communication in cross-cultural settings and community engagement. Such people may not 'toe' the government or academic line and it is for this very reason that they should be in the room, especially when dealing with novel pathogens.

Thank you for your efforts. I look forward to reading your report in due course.

Sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Robyn Alders.

Robyn Alders, AO, BSc(Vet) BVSc DipVetClinStud PhD