

Submission: Australian Federal COVID-19 Response Inquiry

To the Review Panel,

If any lesson is to be drawn from the Federal Government's Covid pandemic management, it is that Australia should go back to its pre-COVID-19 pandemic management plan (the AHMPPI).¹ Under no circumstances should this Inquiry give the green light to repeating the Government's COVID-19 pandemic response tactics in the next pandemic. It was an unmitigated failure.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian Government panicked and threw wisdom, scientific method and ethics out the window. This was regrettable, and has had devastating impacts on our economy and social fabric, as documented in several independent reviews to date.²

Key points addressing terms of reference:

1. The Federal Government failed to protect Australians from workplace discrimination by voting down the COVID-19 Vaccination Status (Prevention of Discrimination) Bill 2022 and the Fair Work Amendment (Prohibiting COVID-19 Vaccine Discrimination) Bill 2023.³ The Government's failure to protect its citizens from workplace discrimination in the form of vaccine mandates caused undue stress, loss of income, degraded mental health, and economic strain as some able Australians were forced into unemployment for months or years. As mandates are still in place in some industries, this failure is ongoing.
2. The Federal Government's pandemic response spending, especially on COVID-19 treatments, has been extraordinarily wasteful. Of the first 255 million vaccine doses purchased, it was reported that only 60 million were used, with more than half set to expire and be dumped, to the estimated value of approximately \$3 billion.⁴ To date, the Government has spent more than

¹ <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/australian-health-management-plan-for-pandemic-influenza-ahmppt?language=en>

² <https://ipa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/220921-iPA-Report-Hard-Lessons-Reckoning-the-economic-social-and-humanitarian-costs-of-zero-COVID.pdf>

https://assets-global.website-files.com/62b998c0c9af9f65bba26051/6350438b7df8c77439846e97_FAULT-LINES-1.pdf

https://www.thegreatcovidpanic.com/files/ugd/23eb94_33b4f30ef8fa4e6eaf1a7e62d571a9a7.pdf

³ https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/VaccineDiscrimination

⁴ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-07-18/australia-covid-vaccine-surplus-options/101237430>

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\$18 billion on COVID-19 treatments, many of which have expired unused.⁵ The Government has never offered a coherent reason for purchasing such a vast supply of vaccine doses that could never have been used before expiry. This is an unacceptable waste of public funds.

3. The Federal Government blocked access to treatments for COVID-19 that had a body of evidence behind them and were relatively cheap. Blocking access to viable treatments is undemocratic and inhumane.⁶
4. The Federal COVID-19 Vaccine Injury Compensation Scheme is too narrow, slow, and inadequate. Injured Australians say they feel “hung out to dry.” In the first 18 months of the scheme, only 5% of claims had been approved.⁷ Such shameful treatment of our vaccine injured by the Federal Government, which failed to protect Australians from vaccine mandates imposed by the state governments, will only encourage vaccine hesitancy, because Australians know they are on their own if they get hurt by their vaccination.
5. The Federal drug regulator, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), has no idea how many of the adverse events reported to its DAEN database are actually caused by the COVID-19 vaccines. Yet, the TGA maintains that the COVID-19 vaccines are safe. This is unacceptable. The TGA has failed in its regulatory duties, performing little to no follow up on reported injuries and deaths.⁸ Further, in some cases, the TGA has hidden reported child deaths from public view in order to manipulate public opinion on the COVID-19 vaccine program.⁹ This is an egregious betrayal of public trust and will only undermine confidence in the TGA, the Department of Health, and Australia’s COVID-19 and National Immunisation Programs. The Federal Government should conduct a serious review of the TGA’s practices, addressing its funding model and the potential conflicts posed.
6. Former Prime Minister Scott Morrison made a mockery of the when he secretly appointed himself to five different ministries.¹⁰ The review should recommend that provisions be made to prevent Prime Ministers from

⁵ <https://www.health.gov.au/our-work/covid-19-vaccines/about-rollout/vaccine-agreements>

⁶ <https://www.tga.gov.au/news/media-releases/new-restrictions-prescribing-ivermectin-covid-19>

⁷ <https://umbrellaneews.com.au/featured/2023/06/government-stalls-on-compo-for-covid-vaccine-injuries/>

⁸ <https://news.rebekahbarnett.com.au/p/australias-drug-regulator-admits>

⁹ <https://news.rebekahbarnett.com.au/p/breaking-australias-drug-regulator>

¹⁰ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-08-17/scott-morrison-secret-ministry-appointments-who-knew-timeline/101337414>

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exercising such abuse of power going forward.

7. National cabinet meeting minutes should not be kept under lock and key. It is inappropriate that both Liberal and Labor governments have maintained secrecy around key pandemic decision-making that affected all Australians.¹¹
8. The Federal Government's myopic obsession with vaccines at the expense of public health messaging and funding for major determinants of health put Australians' lives at risk, and this continues to this day. Obesity and low Vitamin D are significant risk factors for poor COVID-19 outcomes, yet the Government has barely acknowledged this, let alone campaigned for healthy weight and improved Vitamin D levels in 'combatting COVID-19.'¹² Cynics might suggest that the Government's lack of interest in low-cost solutions to COVID-19 is suggestive of its need to bolster commercial partnerships with vaccine manufacturers, such as its Moderna partnership in Melbourne.¹³ The Government's future health responses should be built around what *works*, not what commercial partnerships can be leveraged from the response.
9. The Government has provided no Cost Benefit Analysis for its pandemic response. Instead, Government representatives congratulate each other for achieving bureaucratic markers of success. Failure to assess the Government's performance against real outcomes only serves to encourage a culture of 'failing up', which is unfortunately common in the Australian bureaucracy. Please consider making a thorough CBA part of the review process – and if not, why not?

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rebekah Barnett

¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jun/17/anthony-albanese-backflips-on-national-cabinet-secrecy-and-refuses-to-say-why>

¹² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9205425/>
<https://vitaminstopsCovid.info/00-evi/>

¹³ <https://www.industry.gov.au/news/government-and-business-partner-establish-mrna-production-australia>