

I am a recently graduated university student. I studied computer science, so epidemiology is not my field of expertise. But as a concerned citizen, I care deeply about the extent to which we, as a country, can prevent the next pandemic or at least respond to it in such a way that minimises loss of life and economic disruption.

I am very pleased to see that the Commonwealth Government is holding an inquiry into the response to COVID-19. As a society, I believe we are not prioritising enough preventing the next pandemic. My sense is that people believe pandemics are rare, and since we just had one we don't need to worry about it happening again for a long time.

I very much disagree with this idea however, since the risk of pandemics seems to be increasing and there is certainly no set timeline that pathogens need to adhere to. There is very much the possibility that we will get unlucky and have another pandemic sooner than expected.

I would love for the Government to invest more in improving Indoor Air Quality (IAQ). What I like about this possibility is that it could have broad benefits for public health, in addition to helping with pandemic prevention and responses. If nothing else, it would likely help to reduce the prevalence of the flu.

There seems to be a lot of potential for far UVC as a technology for neutralising pathogens in indoor spaces. No doubt, there are still a lot of unknowns regarding how it can be used safely and economically, but further research would help to clear up such concerns.

But better air ventilation and filtration using existing technology could already have the potential to greatly improve IAQ as well. And so there's really no reason why work cannot be done on this right away.

Ideally there should be serious consideration made as to how the Government can best speed up the adoption of current and future methods of improved IAQ. Perhaps this would come in the form of regulatory standards or incentives for businesses and organisations seeking to make such improvements. Certainly the Government should itself invest in such improvements for governmental buildings—particularly hospitals—as well.

In addition to this, research into better PPE could also prove to be a flexible way of preventing and responding to future pandemics. In combination with better IAQ, improvements in PPE could make a big difference in preventing lab leaks, the spread of pandemics through hospitals and in helping to give essential workers the confidence they need to keep the services we rely on going during a pandemic.

Thank you for your consideration. While COVID-19 was a terrible tragedy, I am fearful that the next pandemic could actually be much worse. If we can do as much as we can to help mitigate that harm, that would make an enormous difference for Australians and for the world.