

I am an Allied Health care worker working in private practice and my mother has [REDACTED]. Whilst there were actions that Australia made, especially early in the pandemic, there are a lot of decisions which have harmed our response.

I disagree with the National Cabinet group being established as it has been able to meet in secret and make decisions without public health officials present. I have concerns about National cabinet having conflicts of interest and that the public are unable to hold them accountable for decisions made. I appreciate that the National Cabinet has been instrumental in decision making, the lack of transparency and accountability should be addressed.

Early in the pandemic Australia was using hotels as quarantine facilities which were not fit for purpose. SARS-COV-2 is airborne and states should have urgently built appropriate quarantine facilities, failure to do so meant that there were a number of occasions in my state where infection leaked into the community resulting in disruptive lockdown, appropriate quarantine would have reduced this risk.

In my experience recently the Albanese government has been incompetent in it's procurement of the most up to date vaccines in 2022 and 2023. In late 2022 we should have had access to BA.5 vaccines as they were available in the USA and best matched to circulating variants at the time. The BA.5 bivalent was only available from early 2023, after the surge of infections where they would have made the most difference. The government and ATAGI have repeated the same error in 2023, meaning that we are only now getting some limited access to XBB 1.5 monovalent vaccines, where we should have had generally access for all adults and children. Eligibility criteria for vaccination is often changeable and confusing.

Public health messaging in Australia has been atrocious since the government has essentially given up trying to reduce SARS-COV-2 infections and the harm they cause to the population. Our politicians rarely mention the pandemic or model mask wearing. During epidemic surges public health campaigns highlighting airborne transmission, vaccination, dangers of long covid, and n95 use could make a big difference to the impact of the disease.

Australia could improve preparedness for the next pandemic by addressing failings from the current one. Ensuring that the country has enough appropriate quarantine facilities, enough n95 or above PPE, normalising n95 use in healthcare, and having good public health messaging on how infections are transmitted. Groups such as the John Snow project (<https://johnsnowproject.org>) show how messaging could be done to encourage mask use and educate the public to the dangers of infection.