

# Submission to the COVID-19 Response Inquiry

I am an academic working in a large public university. I regularly teach sizeable undergraduate student cohorts in lecture- and tutorial-based subjects in large lecture theatre settings.

## **Poor ongoing public health policies, messaging and guidance from government and health authorities around the continue COVID-19 pandemic**

Although the shift to online teaching during 2020 and 2021 was disruptive, I have significant concerns about the way in which the return to face-to-face teaching was handled as a result of positions taken by government and health authorities.

Although I am conscious that protocols for the resumption of in-person teaching were the responsibility of individual universities, those policies have largely taken place in the context of a lack of clear leadership, policies, public health messaging and guidance from federal and state authorities and public health agencies.

Despite the fact that we continue to face ongoing waves of COVID-19 infections, no strong mitigation measures have been established to minimise transmission in high-risk indoor settings. In particular:

- there have been no policies requiring minimum air-quality standards or stipulating number of air-changes per hour, especially in the context of crowded indoor spaces, for example, in the context of large fully-enclosed lecture theatres or other teaching spaces. There is no widely available real-time air quality data that is made readily available for these settings.
- government and health authorities have not established or normalised a culture of wearing of high-quality P2 or N95 face masks in settings in which many people are gathered together indoors.
- messaging over maintaining up-to-date vaccination has weakened over time, resulting in fewer people having maximum vaccination protection. However, I do appreciate that ATAGI has continued to make regular booster doses available to Australian adults without specific health conditions. I would like to see this continue, although I believe that more can be done to encourage their uptake. Nevertheless, I would also like to see the availability of the paediatric vaccine for ages 6 months to 5 years.

Thank you for considering this submission.