

MEDIA RELEASE

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COVID-19 inquiry must focus on how Australia can be better prepared

The AMA welcomes the federal government's inquiry into COVID-19, saying the inquiry's focus must be on how Australia can be better prepared for a pandemic.

Australian Medical Association President Professor Steve Robson said Australia had managed the COVID-19 pandemic very well but could have done better.

"There are many lessons to be learned from how Australia handled the pandemic, and the AMA will make sure the lived experiences of Australia's doctors are listened to throughout the review," Professor Robson said.

"The pandemic has had a profound impact on every doctor in Australia. We have all been involved in the response whether it was through vaccinating, treating patients, working extra shifts to cover colleagues who were infected, or simply spending time every day putting on PPE and taking it off again — over and over."

Professor Robson thanked Australia's doctors for their efforts which saved Australian lives.

"Australia had very low rates of transmission before vaccines were made available and we then had one of the most successful vaccination programs globally. This was largely thanks to our GPs who delivered the largest proportion of initial doses and educated patients about the importance of getting vaccinated to protect them and their families.

"One of the other key strengths of Australia's response to the pandemic was the prominence of medical and scientific expert advice. The AMA would like to see this become an intrinsic part of any future pandemic response plan.

"We will also be highlighting to government the significant impact the pandemic had on frontline healthcare workers.

"The pandemic had — and continues to have — an ongoing impact at all levels of the system from interfering with medical training, fundamentally changing how general practices run, and adding to the logjam in our public hospitals to name a few."

While the terms of reference largely focus on the Commonwealth Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic it is difficult to see how it can avoid taking a close look at the actions of states/territories during the pandemic.

"The reality is that our response to COVID-19 involved all levels of government in areas like health service delivery, public health restrictions, vaccination roll out and economic support for businesses and individuals. Many decisions were interrelated, and the inquiry needs to get the full picture if it is to come up with robust and effective recommendations."

Professor Robson said the planned Centre for Disease Control (CDC), which the AMA had been calling for since 2017, needed to play a central role in future pandemic planning and response.

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