

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## Governments must be guided by experts and evidence in pandemic responses

Australia must put aside politics and seize a crucial opportunity offered by the COVID-19 Response Inquiry, to ensure the country is adequately prepared for future pandemics.

In a [submission to the federal government's inquiry](#), the Australian Medical Association has urged all governments and political parties to listen to the advice of medical and scientific experts in the handling of pandemics.

AMA President Professor Steve Robson said the success of Australia's response was primarily because governments generally listened to the advice of the medical and scientific community, particularly in the first 18 months.

"This inquiry provides a crucial opportunity to learn from past missteps and improve the country's preparedness for future pandemics," Professor Robson said.

"While it was far from perfect, Australia's pandemic response was quite effective. We had among the lowest excess mortality rates of comparable nations — despite relatively low additional health system spending during the pandemic — and achieved world-leading rates of vaccination by the end of the rollout's first year. Our response saved many Australian lives.

"But we don't want to see governments put the past behind us. We want them to evaluate and learn from Australia's pandemic response, with a focus on listening to experts and ensuring consistency in policies and communication across jurisdictions."

The AMA submission also notes that Australia's response was most effective when federal, state and territory governments cooperated to manage the impact of the virus.

"Overall, the AMA was very supportive of a range of measures, policies and programs implemented during the pandemic such as isolation periods, social distancing and income support," Professor Robson said.

"However, as the pandemic progressed, we saw the response take on a political nature, where state leaders actively undermined their chief health officers in public. Not only did this undermine the public's trust in policies, but it also undermined the medical profession's faith in their politicians to make the right decisions.

"It is essential this engagement with experts is built into responses consistently at all levels of government going forward."

Issues like failure to meaningfully engage with and support general practice early enough and addressing existing issues in our health system — in particular public hospitals and aged care — are also addressed in the submission. The AMA's submission also highlights the importance of an adequately resourced Australian Centre for Disease Control (CDC), which can undertake several pandemic response functions including rapid risk assessment, scientific briefings, public education and disease prevention. The findings of this review must help guide the work of the CDC.

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