

15 December 2023

Dear Sir / Madam

██████████ welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Commonwealth Government's Inquiry into the COVID-19 Response.

██████████ is proud of the contribution it has made to the Australian Community during the COVID-19 pandemic through the ██████████

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Following the global outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020, the development of safe and effective vaccines and treatments became the top priority of governments, medical researchers and the medicines and vaccines industry. During this time, ██████████

██████████ Models have estimated that tens of millions of lives have been saved because of these vaccines.<sup>1</sup>

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Furthermore, the Australian Government's strategy to establish and maintain a portfolio of COVID-19 vaccines continues to serve Australia well, helping reduce the risk of severe disease, hospitalisation and death from COVID-19 and reducing the associated impact on the healthcare system and economy.

Although the end of the COVID-19 emergency response was officially declared on 20 October 2023, Australia's Chief Medical Officer, alongside the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC), reiterated that: "*a focus remains on vaccination, prevention,*

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099\(22\)00417-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099(22)00417-0/fulltext)

reducing transmission and management of serious illness, hospitalisations and death"<sup>2</sup> as we move towards the next phase of the public health response.

On this basis, and as Australia continues to reflect on the lessons learned throughout the pandemic, [REDACTED]

to the COVID-19 Response Inquiry Panel attention two important matters for considerations.

1. The ongoing importance of maintaining a portfolio approach to COVID-19 vaccine procurement and supply, as recommended by the Halton review in 2022.

2. [REDACTED]

### **Maintaining a portfolio approach to COVID-19 vaccine procurement and supply**

As Australia enters its eighth COVID-19 wave, [REDACTED] encourages the Government to remain vigilant to COVID-19 as an ongoing and evolving threat. The ebbs and flows of COVID-19 cases are due to ongoing circulation within the community and evolving mutations within the SARS-CoV-2 virus, with [variants](#) Eris (EG.5.1) and Pirola (BA.2.86) responsible for the current spike in cases.

As of 6 December, Department of Health statistics on COVID-19 vaccination indicates that:

- Only 23 per cent of adults aged 75 and older received a 2023 booster dose in the last 6 months.
- Only 15 per cent of adults aged 65 to 74 received a 2023 booster dose in the last 6 months.
- Only 3.8 per cent of individuals aged 18 to 64 years have received a 2023 Booster Dose in the last six months

The consequences of declining vaccination rates could be severe as the virus continues to cause more hospitalizations and deaths than influenza and health experts including Australia's Chief Medical officer continue to advocate for the need for ongoing vaccination to prevent serious illness, hospitalization and death. In this context, it will be important to continue to implement the seven accepted [recommendations](#) of the *Independent Review of COVID-19 Vaccine and Treatment Purchasing and Procurement* (the [REDACTED] Review) and in particular the policy recommendation for 'the continuation of a portfolio approach to vaccines and treatments.'

Within her review, Professor [REDACTED] [praised](#) the portfolio approach taken by the Australian Government in their early procurement of COVID-19 vaccines and treatments. She notes that a 'diverse portfolio of vaccines and treatments provides Australian's flexibility of choice and enables the government to address variants of concern in future'.

Specifically, maintaining a diverse portfolio of vaccine suppliers:

1. safeguards against unexpected disruptions experienced by a single supplier, thereby ensuring supply redundancy and uninterrupted access to vaccines,
2. empowers individuals and their healthcare providers to make informed decisions based on their specific needs and preferences, and
3. bolsters resilience against emerging variants, as choice enables the best protection against the evolving nature of the virus.

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<sup>2</sup> Statement from Australia's Chief Medical Officer, Professor Paul Kelly, on the end of the COVID-19 emergency response. <https://www.health.gov.au/news/end-of-covid-19-emergency-response?language=en>

[REDACTED]

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