



Secretaries Board

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Meeting Paper

COVID-19 Response Inquiry

Lead: Robyn Kruk AO, Chair, COVID-19 Response Inquiry

Action required

- Board to **note and discuss** the update from Ms Kruk AO on the COVID-19 Response Inquiry (the inquiry).
- Board to **note** the inquiry panel will progressively meet with Secretaries one-to-one to discuss lessons learned and proposed recommendations relevant to their portfolio.
- Board to **agree** the inquiry panel will come back to a future Secretaries Board meeting to discuss (July/August 2024).

Purpose of discussion/Key issues

Inquiry conduct and progress

Since October 2023, the inquiry has received 2,110 submissions; and conducted over 90 interviews including former Premiers/Chief Ministers, all First Secretaries, current and former Secretaries and agency heads, former Royal Commissioners, academics and community leaders.

These interviews are ongoing and will include former Australian Government decision makers, unions, industry groups, community groups and business. Roundtables are being held (April – June 2024) with key organisations and experts and lived experience focus groups with priority cohorts.

Key themes arising

Based on key metrics, internationally Australia was comparatively successful in responding to the pandemic. Feedback to the panel strongly suggests improvements where there were unintended or inequitable impacts on citizens. While the Federation will always create complexity, a shared commitment to keeping Australians safe positioned us well to navigate these challenges. A key focus of the inquiry is to identify the drivers of our success to inform future planning and preparedness and ensure that governance arrangements can effectively adapt to a future incident.

s 47C , s 47E(d)

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s 47C , s 47E(d)

s 47B(a)

s 47C , s 47E(d)

s 47C , s 47E(d)

While relationships are consistently identified as a key part of Australia’s success in responding to COVID-19, they supplement rather than replace robust and rigorously tested preparedness and response systems. The process of building and testing these systems will embed lasting relationships as occurred through successive counter terrorism and other exercises.

The panel hopes to be invited back to Secretaries Board later this year to discuss in more detail the key themes and emerging recommendations. The panel will also progressively reach out to individual Secretaries for follow-up meetings on issues that would benefit from further in-depth discussion.

The taskforce is working closely with departments to ensure reforms in areas such as aged care, health, and national resilience are acknowledged and inform the inquiry’s considerations.

The panel thanks all departments for their constructive engagement with the inquiry to date. The taskforce will continue to engage with Commonwealth departments to gather information, understand the current policy landscape and test early directions.

Cascade note

The Board received an update from Ms Robyn Kruk AO, Panel Chair, on the progress of the Commonwealth Government COVID-19 Response Inquiry, including stakeholder engagement and emerging themes for the inquiry.

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COVID-19 Response Inquiry

Meeting brief

Purpose	Update on the COVID-19 Response Inquiry
Timing and venue	10.20am – 10.45am, Wednesday 10 April 2024 s 47E(d) [REDACTED] One National Circuit, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Attendees	External: Secretaries Board - the Attendance List is at Attachment A , and - Secretaries' roles during the COVID-19 pandemic is at Attachment B
	Internal: Robyn Kruk AO

Talking Points

- Thank you for giving me the opportunity to update you on the COVID-19 Response Inquiry.
- I am looking to cover off three key areas today:
 - Emerging themes.
 - How the inquiry is aligning with broader reform work – primarily around national resilience but there are a range of other system-level reforms underway.
 - Next steps including future engagement with Secretaries

Emerging themes:


s 47C , s 47E(d)

s 47B(a)

s 47C , s 47E(d)

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s 47C , s 47E(d)



Alignment with other reforms

- The inquiry's scope intersects with other reforms underway across government (e.g. emergency management, healthcare, aged care, higher education). The panel is conscious of the need to work closely with departments on key intersecting issues to ensure recommendations can be implemented as part of the government's broader agenda.
- Of particular focus is the resilience agenda:
 - o I have met with Duncan Lewis AO DSC CSC regarding his work with the National Preparedness Taskforce and with the Resilience and Crisis Management Division in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.
 - o I've also met with Department of Home Affairs and the National Emergency Management Agency to discuss their work and how the inquiry may align with that.

- s 47C , s 47E(d)



Next steps

- Ahead of the inquiry reporting to Government on 30 September 2024, I am hoping the panel will be invited to brief you in detail on our likely recommendations.
- I also intend to organise to meet with you one-on-one to test our thinking in regard to your specific portfolio responsibilities.
- As the Chair of the Inquiry Panel, the approach I'm taking is to ensure the report we produce is grounded in evidence and reflects the diversity of experiences across the board.

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- Finally, can I thank you and your departments. The assistance the panel and taskforce has received is greatly appreciated. In particular, I thank those who have made staff available to the taskforce.
- We can't do this work without the ongoing cooperation from across the Commonwealth and this will be important in getting the best value from this inquiry.

Cleared through: Pauline Sullivan, First Assistant Secretary

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Agenda

Wednesday, 10 April 2024 | s 22(1)(a)(ii)

CHAIR Professor Glyn Davis AC, Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

AGENDA ITEM	LEAD	TIME
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s 22(1)(a)(ii)		
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3. COVID-19 RESPONSE INQUIRY	Chair Ms Robyn Kruk AO <i>Chair of the Independent Panel for the COVID-19 Response Inquiry</i>	s 22(1)(a)(ii)
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