



Roundtable Summary – Health Research

Date: Monday 13 May 2024

Host: Professor Catherine Bennett, Panel Member, Commonwealth Government COVID-19 Response Inquiry

Participants: The roundtable brought together health research representatives to discuss areas where the Australian Government did well in generating and using evidence, and key concerns identified in submissions where improvements can strengthen the use of research in future crises.

Purpose of this roundtable

- During the pandemic, research informed key aspects of Australia’s health response.
- While the sector provided vital evidence, health researchers across Australia have noted there are many lessons to be learnt from their experiences.
- The roundtable provided health research representatives with the opportunity to share their thoughts on what the Australian Government did well and what could be improved for a future crisis.

What we heard at the roundtable

- The role real-time research plays linking with policy to generate actionable insights, and the importance of confidence and trust in the evidence by decision-makers and the public.
- Health evidence needs to be considered in its broadest sense, including communicable disease intelligence, as well as social and behavioural research, and monitoring the effectiveness and safety of interventions.
- Evidence that informs policy is central to effective communication of the need for public health policy and practices to front line workers and the public.
- Uncertainty needs to be effectively communicated to decision-makers, front line workers and the public in risk assessment and predictions of intervention effectiveness.
- Leadership is required to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in generating and collating evidence via coordinated, interoperable systems across jurisdictions for data collection and sharing.
- There needs to be transparency in the evidence relied upon, including the details of modelling.
- To enable fast activation, need systems, networks and agreements already in place to support rapid research, the standing up of cohorts of first cases and clinical trials in crises, including funding pathways, pre-approved data access and ethics protocols .

COVID-19 Response Inquiry

- Established research and surveillance infrastructure is vital in crises, including understanding the wider health, social and economic impacts of public health measures, and how these are distributed within and across communities.
- Public trust is vital during a pandemic, and misinformation can quickly fill the void where there is limited sharing of evidence.
- Australia saw real research innovations during the pandemic, and these capabilities must be maintained so we are ready to go for the next pandemic.