



MEDIA RELEASE

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## **Go8 provides evidence-based “Roadmap to Recovery” report to Federal Government**

An expert taskforce of more than 100 researchers drawn from across the Group of Eight (Go8) Universities has presented the Australian Government with a “Roadmap to Recovery”, a report aimed at helping Government plot the best path through COVID-19.

The [Report](#), the most comprehensive of its kind presented to Government, presents two options for consideration: Elimination or Controlled Adaption. The report notes that, until a vaccine is developed that confers immunity to all Australians, COVID-19 will remain in the community and many will still be susceptible.

The Taskforce was co-chaired by Professor Shitij Kapur, Dean of Medicine at the University of Melbourne and Vicki Thomson, Chief Executive of the Go8.

“The expert advice of the Go8-based world-leading researchers was presented to Government on Monday 27 April on the two options to move Australia through its exit and, importantly, recovery phase of COVID-19,” says Go8 Chief Executive and Taskforce Co-Chair Vicki Thomson. “The report’s focus is vitally dual – focusing on both the nation’s health and economy.

“Understanding that the Government had already ruled out the so-called ‘let it rip’ herd immunity option, our researchers concluded, and clearly set out, that there were two viable options to move Australia forward.

Ms Thomson said the committed researchers had all volunteered for the extremely intense project during which they worked across public holidays and well into each night. “We are extremely proud to call them ours,” she said, and they were commended with gratitude for their commitment by Federal Health Minister Greg Hunt. *\*please note extended thank you from Minister Hunt at end of this release.*

“We hope that what we have provided will now greatly assist the Government as it wrestles to work through how best to take Australia forward with this decision due in mid-May,” said Ms Thomson. “It is not the Go8’s job to set policy. Our role is to ensure Government receives the best advice available. The complex and difficult role of setting policy belongs to Government,” she said.

Taskforce co-chair, Professor Shitij Kapur, said that since the National Cabinet had already charted a course through to mid-May, our job was not to second guess that but to explore solutions beyond that date. The Go8 taskforce therefore focused on providing options for consideration from May 11 onwards.

“Australia is in a special place among comparable Western nations, and fortunate, to have two options – elimination or suppression.” he said. “This is only feasible because of our success in controlling the virus so far. From the peak of the epidemic in late March when we saw nearly 500 cases a day, the number of daily new cases now are less than 10.

“This report examines the options and makes recommendations not just for social distancing options, but for the ethical framework, the pre-requisites for long term success and the imperatives in implementation,” he said.

“The report differs from the hundreds of articles and opinion pieces on COVID-19 *because it specifies the evidence on which it is based*, and it was produced by researchers who are experts and leaders in their area, and it engaged the broadest range of disciplines – from mathematicians, to virologists, to philosophers,” said Professor Kapur.

The two different strategies put forward call for different community acceptance and understanding. The main points are set out below.

*Elimination Strategy:*

- continuation of the lock-down further than mid-May in certain jurisdictions, likely by another 30 days while waiting for cases from local sources to fall to zero and remain at that level for a few weeks
- more extensive testing and contract tracing
- Advantage of this approach is there are likely to be fewer infections, hospitalisations and deaths
- It is likely to create a higher psychological sense of safety allowing for more vigorous economic recovery

Controlled Adaption: (Suppression)

- gradual relaxation of restrictions and adaptive relaxation of social distancing as early as mid-May
- minimal level of ongoing infections that can be managed within the health system
- there is a risk infection could spike and lead to surges, requiring the re-imposition of strict social distancing measures as has occurred in Singapore
- the difficulty of predicting how confident the public will feel when restrictions are lifted may impact the resumption of economic and social life.

**Message of gratitude to researchers from Minister Hunt:**

*“Dear Colleagues, Prof. Kapur just shared with me the collective effort that you and the Go8 are undertaking to start thinking about an inclusive Roadmap to Recovery consistent with our National Plans. I am pleased that so many of you are working together on this. I realize that many of you are giving up weekends and holidays to make this happen. Australia needs its best minds to work together for the benefit of all Australians now. I look forward to your outputs in the next two weeks. As you would imagine the Government is also doing deep thinking and policy work on not just the process of flattening the curve of infections but also the road out. Your work will both help inform, guide and where necessary challenge our ongoing work, and for that I am deeply thankful.”*

Contact: Vicki Thomson, Group of Eight Chief Executive on +61 417 808 472

## **Go8 Roadmap to Recovery FAQs**

### **Q: Does the Go8 present a preferred option.**

No.

That was not the role of the taskforce. The researchers have presented two options to Government – both evidence-based. It is now for Government to decide how to use this research to develop its strategy and policy.

Both options can lead us to recovery - the bumps along the way might be different.

### **Q: What exactly does Elimination mean? Does it mean no more COVID-19 in Australia?**

A: Elimination means no more locally-transmitted COVID-19 cases within the community in Australia (as far as testing and monitoring can determine) – understanding that there are still likely to be cases occurring in people arriving in Australia.

But this is not a one-off, fix-and-forget-about-it, situation. We must keep testing to ensure COVID-19 does not reappear. We would also have to manage travel between regions, which have and haven't achieved virus elimination.

Australian States and Territories are all on different COVID-19 trajectories. Under the elimination strategy, travel between States would need to be managed carefully until national elimination was achieved, including quarantining. This would be under constant review by expert medical committees.

### **Q: Was there a priority issue in this collaboration? Was it for example, health over the economy, or the economy over health?**

A: The Go8 taskforce was at all times guided by an ethical framework that clarified key values and principles. They are listed in the report but included things such as:

- Equal access to healthcare and a social safety net must be provided for all members of our community.
- The economic cost must be shared fairly across the whole community.
- The issue of shared responsibility. Look out for each other's welfare and best interest.

### **Q: How many people will lose their lives under each option based on current trends?**

A: That is something that we believed would be irresponsible to estimate in this report – particularly given the different detailed strategies. We have concentrated on measures to minimise the spread of COVID-19, in a sustainable way, as the best approach to minimising fatalities.

**Q: Do you present a best-case scenario? What is the earliest the taskforce considers this could be over? How soon could we return to the local pub, nightclub, sporting event or the gym?**

A: Under the Controlled Adaption strategy it has been suggested that there could be a gradual lifting of restrictions from mid-May. However, there is a risk that infections could then spike and lead to a surge and thus, even stricter social distancing measures would have to be implemented. Under the Elimination strategy, each State is at a different stage; some will be able to start relaxing restrictions very soon and others would need to keep restrictions in place for up to another 30 days. Of course, there are many factors influencing both these assumptions.

**Q: A vaccine is a long way away – when the time comes will it be compulsory?**

A: That would be our advice – yes. Just in the same way that vaccinations for conditions such as measles are required to maintain community safety.

**Q: What if we don't get a vaccine? The report says that we need a vaccine to exit from both the elimination and controlled adaptation strategies. But experts say that a vaccine is 12-18 months away – at least – and that a vaccine is not guaranteed.**

A: Both strategies would need to stay in place to keep Australia safe until there is a vaccine and/or effective treatments. The world's medical researchers – including some of the best in Australia and the Go8 – will develop a vaccine, with human trials on some vaccine candidates close to starting. However, should progress towards a vaccine be slower than expected we will have to revisit current strategies. It is important to note that our response to COVID-19 is not “set and forget” but is to continually refine the response by the trajectory of COVID-19 in Australia, and our increased knowledge of the virus. The Go8 report provides a framework for making decisions in this context.

**Q: Is “Controlled Adaption” a more palatable name for herd immunity?**

A: No – definitely not. Herd immunity was not considered. Government had already said it would not consider it for Australia, and the taskforce also did not consider it was an appropriate social policy option for Australia.

**Q: Does the report recommend when international travel restrictions should be lifted?**

A: For both options, the report recommends that international travel bans stay in place for at least the next 6 months allowing only essential international travel. Two-week quarantine restrictions should also continue to apply for at least the next 6 months for returning essential travellers. These measures are to stop COVID-19 re-entering Australia.

**Q: Why don't you consider lockdown for at-risk cohorts (e.g. over 65s and those with pre-existing conditions) allowing the rest of the economy to keep running?**

A: Not enough is yet known about COVID-19 to determine how to precisely define at-risk cohorts and what puts them at risk. The report does recommend further urgent analysis to figure this out. Until we have this information – which will be vital for whatever strategy Australia adopts – we must protect all Australians as much as we can.

**Q: Events have been moving fast. Some States had already announced the lifting of restrictions, even before this report was released. Has the report come too late to be useful?**

A: The Go8 believes that Australia will always be best served by evidence-based decisions – decisions based on verifiable fact. The Roadmap to Recovery report provides Government with the most comprehensive advice currently available, adapted for an Australian context, and grounded in evidence. There is a long way yet to go in successfully managing this crisis. Not only is it not too late for the Roadmap to Recovery report, there will be an ongoing need for such expertise.

**Q: Can you set out the process which developed the comprehensive evidence-based report**

A: The Go8 convened a group of over a hundred of the country's leading epidemiologists, infectious disease consultants, public health specialists, healthcare professionals, mental health and well-being practitioners, indigenous scholars, communications and behaviour change experts, ethicists, philosophers, economists and business scholars. All are part of the wealth of knowledge that resides within the Go8.

The Roadmap was developed in less than three weeks, through remote meetings and a special collaborative reasoning platform from the University of Melbourne's Hunt Laboratory for Intelligence Research. The computer platform is known as SWARM, and it enables researchers to rapidly come to an agreed analysis and produce a short report when faced with a complex array of information. Initially, Taskforce members operated anonymously, no one was nominated to be a leader or told what part of the problem to focus on. The process evolved over time, allowing groups to work together flexibly, including more traditional report-writing processes in the last couple of weeks.