



**The Hon. Scott Morrison MP**  
Prime Minister

**MEDIA STATEMENT**

Friday 17 September 2021

**NATIONAL CABINET STATEMENT**

National Cabinet met today to discuss Australia's COVID-19 response, recent outbreaks of COVID-19 and the Australian COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy.

National Cabinet continues to work together to address issues and find solutions for the health and economic consequences of COVID-19.

Since the beginning of the pandemic there have been 82,202 confirmed cases in Australia and, sadly, 1,138 people have died. More than 35.2 million tests have been undertaken. Testing has increased nationally over recent days with 1,574,446 tests reported in the past 7 days.

Globally there have been over 226.9 million cases and sadly over 4.6 million deaths, with 674,536 new cases and 11,033 deaths reported in the last 24 hours. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to surge in many countries around the world.

Australia's COVID-19 vaccine roll out continues to expand. To date over 24 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered in Australia, including 302,141 in the previous 24 hours.

In the previous 7 days, more than 1.9 million vaccines have been administered in Australia. More than 70.4 per cent of the Australian population aged 16 years and over have now had a first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, including over 85.3 per cent of over 50 year olds and more than 91.9 per cent of over 70 year olds.

More than 45.3 per cent of Australians aged 16 years and over are now fully vaccinated including more than 64.5 per cent of over 50 year olds and more than 73.2 per cent of Australians over 70 years of age.

Today, Chief Medical Officer Professor Paul Kelly provided an update on current outbreaks of COVID-19. The Chief Medical Officer noted the outbreaks in New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory.

All leaders reiterated the importance of Australians, especially those in vulnerable groups, to get two doses of a COVID-19 vaccination.

Professor Brendan Murphy, Secretary of the Commonwealth Department of Health, provided an update on the work being done by the Commonwealth and all states and territories looking at health system capacity for managing COVID-19 cases during Phases B and C of the National Plan, and the Chief Medical Officer provided an update on the Test, Trace, Isolate and Quarantine (TTIQ) work

underway through AHPPC. Leaders discussed in detail the health system capacity within jurisdictions, with further analysis to come back to the next meeting of National Cabinet. NSW and Victoria provided an update on the detailed planning already underway in their jurisdictions.

National Cabinet received a briefing from Lieutenant General John Frewen, DSC, AM, Coordinator General of the National COVID Vaccine Taskforce (Operation COVID Shield). National Cabinet welcomed the roll out through pharmacies of the Moderna vaccine from next week. Further work is underway to support booster shot roll out, subject to approvals.

State and territory leaders received an update on work underway in some jurisdictions to progress home quarantine trials for fully vaccinated Australians. All jurisdictions agreed to integrate an individuals' record of COVID-19 immunisation history into state and territory check-in apps. The record of COVID-19 immunisation history will be used within these check-in apps as per requirements under state and territory public health orders.

All leaders agreed that National Cabinet has strengthened relationships between governments by facilitating regular discussions in the national interest, founded on the same principles of trust, confidence and collaboration which underpin State, Territory and Commonwealth Cabinets. Today National Cabinet members have provided a joint statement reaffirming this, which is attached.

National Cabinet agreed to meet next on Friday, 1 October 2021.

### **COVID-19 Risk Analysis and Response – Taskforce**

National Cabinet received an update from Professor Jodie McVernon of the Doherty Institute and Mr Phil Gaetjens, Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, on the Doherty modelling of additional scenario and workstreams, and the Taskforce report on reopening.

Doherty's sensitivity analysis found that the Delta variant can be managed at vaccination rates of 70% and 80% when combined with appropriate test, trace, isolate and quarantine (TTIQ) practices and public health and social measures (PHSMs) to control transmission and to manage capacity of the health system.

Doherty's sensitivity analysis showed that, even if an outbreak starts with hundreds or thousands of cases, its original conclusions for transitioning to Phases B and C of the National Plan at 70% and 80% vaccination rates respectively remain robust.

The sensitivity analysis confirms that, when daily case numbers are in the tens or hundreds, movement to Phase B can be achieved with vaccination rates of 70% when combined with low-level PHSMs and partial TTIQ or alternatively baseline PHSMs and optimal TTIQ.

When daily case numbers are in the thousands, applying medium PHSMs in the locations of concern would be prudent and improve outcomes as Australia moves to Phase B at 70% vaccination rates, before shifting to low PHSMs from 80%. Given the pace of the vaccination roll out, the transition from 70% to 80% by jurisdiction is modelled to take around two weeks.

Doherty is now undertaking further work that focuses on synergies between vaccination, TTIQ and PHSMs at a small area level and for high-risk groups and settings, including Indigenous Australians and schools.

Professor McVernon noted the impact of COVID-19 on children is already incorporated in the Doherty's previous modelling and the setting of targets. The best way to protect children is for the

adult population, including their parents, to get vaccinated, as they are more likely to transmit COVID-19, and children experience less severe health outcomes from COVID-19.

The Doherty modelling confirms that with high vaccination and appropriate TTIQ and PHSMs to constrain outbreaks, overall cases and deaths are expected to be similar in order of magnitude to annual influenza.

The updated Doherty scenario and Taskforce summary is available on [www.pmc.gov.au](http://www.pmc.gov.au).

### **National Code on Boarding School Students**

With school holidays starting in some states today, National Cabinet endorsed the National Code on Boarding School Students, previously considered by the AHPPC. The Code provides nationally consistent arrangements that help boarding school students, parents, carers and boarding school staff travel across borders between school and home, while also allowing states to take a risk-based approach to health and safety.

**[ENDS]**

## **Statement from the Prime Minister, Premiers, and Chief Ministers**

### **The Importance of Confidentiality to Relationships between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories**

Under longstanding Cabinet conventions, it is understood that discussions and documents of Cabinet are considered confidential. The rationale for the protection of Cabinet confidentiality is that it is necessary to ensure the proper functioning of Cabinet. Cabinet confidentiality ensures that members of National Cabinet may exchange differing views and achieve outcomes together.

Effective working relationships between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories are central to Australia's public interest. The Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments share responsibility for, and must cooperate to achieve, the best outcomes for the Australian people. First Ministers agree that National Cabinet has strengthened these relationships by facilitating regular confidential discussions in the national interest, founded on the same principles of trust, confidence and collaboration which underpin State, Territory and Commonwealth Cabinets.

The National Cabinet was established by the Prime Minister to respond to the COVID-19 global pandemic. All First Ministers agreed to the establishment of National Cabinet as the most appropriate way to provide a coordinated and responsive approach to the complex and fast moving policy and implementation challenges posed by COVID-19.

Since its establishment on 13 March 2020, all members of National Cabinet have participated on the clear understanding that these meetings were conducted according to longstanding Cabinet conventions – most importantly, the confidentiality applied to discussions, papers and records of meetings. Consistent with this, meetings and operations of National Cabinet have been conducted in line with the process outlined in the Commonwealth Government's Cabinet Handbook.

The confidentiality of information and decision-making has been invaluable to National Cabinet, enabling issues to be dealt with quickly, based on advice from experts. The sharing of sensitive information and judgements in a forum that provides the ability for confidential discussions has been of great significance to effective decision making by the States, Territories, and the Commonwealth in the public interest throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The disclosure of National Cabinet documents or discussions other than in accordance with the principles agreed by National Cabinet would undermine its effective operation and severely damage relations between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories. It would potentially expose negotiations and discussions before their conclusion and prevent the open flow of information between members of the National Cabinet. This would undermine the trust between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories and would prevent full and frank discussions that achieve the best outcomes for the Australian public. In turn this would lead to poorer outcomes and adversely affect all governments' abilities to consider and respond to issues urgently, and would undermine the key decisions needed to deliver outcomes in the public interest.

The principles of Cabinet confidentiality which underpin National Cabinet deliberations have not prevented appropriate disclosure of outcomes. By agreement of National Cabinet members, meetings are, and will continue to be, followed by public statements that articulate decisions made by the National Cabinet. This approach is consistent with the conventions and operations of Cabinet and has been critical to building and maintaining public confidence in the National Cabinet without undermining the important principles of Cabinet confidentiality or the sensitivity of the content of the deliberations.