



The Hon Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister
House of Representatives
PO Box 6022
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

Change of course needed for vaccine rollout to succeed

I am writing to you because there are significant shortcomings in the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination program in Indi that I believe warrant your attention.

As you have publicly affirmed many times, the rollout of the vaccine is the most important challenge facing Australia this year. I agree. That is why it is so important that we get it right.

Like all Australians, I want the Government to succeed at this.

To date, I have not publicly commented on the state of the vaccine rollout. I felt it was important to accord the Government appropriate space to get to work.

However over recent weeks, as I have visited health clinics and heard from constituents across Indi, it has become patently clear to me that the rollout is not going smoothly and the Government must urgently change course if we are to succeed in this shared challenge.

In Indi, we have much riding on the success of this rollout. Our region was devastated last year by the prolonged closure of the NSW border. We know that the longer the rollout is delayed, the higher the chances we will be impacted by another border closure. This would be unacceptable.

As such, and in the interests of doing what I can to ensure the Government's success, I feel duty-bound to publicly raise concerns over five specific aspects of the vaccine rollout.

I offer you these insights from on the ground in good faith, and in the hope that you will listen to the now overwhelming chorus of voices calling for sensible changes to the rollout program.

Firstly, GPs are not being sufficiently supported to deliver the vaccine rollout.

Over recent weeks, I have spoken to many GP clinics across Indi and it is abundantly clear that they are not receiving the support they need from Government in terms of equipment or clear advice.

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Some GPs have told me that they received half as many vaccinations as they ordered, others told me they received significantly more than they ordered. For a small clinic, booking in an additional 100 appointments at the last minute, or cancelling 100, is a huge impost. Both of these circumstances are untenable. Some clinics have pulled out of the program altogether for reasons such as this.

Many clinics have told me that vaccines arrive without notice, on irregular intervals, and the clinics have no assurance that they will continue to receive their orders. This means they are having to book appointments into the future with no guarantee they will be able to administer them.

The vaccination clinics themselves are doing phenomenal work in the incredibly difficult circumstances in which they find themselves. But they are not miracle workers. They need clear communication from Government. If there are delays, they need to be told. If they will be receiving more than they ordered, they need to be notified so they can bring on more staff as needed.

When they order consumables – gloves, swabs, syringes, cotton buds – they need to receive it. It is not acceptable for clinics to foot the bill for the Government's failure to provide the necessary medical supplies.

Secondly, I am concerned that people living in smaller regional communities will be left behind in the vaccine rollout.

As of today, there are no currently operating vaccination clinics in towns such as Corryong and Beechworth. In other towns like Mansfield, vaccination clinics will soon be operational, but currently are not operating.

I am fielding requests from my constituents in smaller communities about where they can get vaccinated. And in many cases, I have no answers – because there is no public information about when further clinics will come online, and where they will be located. It is likely there are some towns where the Government has no plans at all to open a vaccination clinic. But we would have no way of knowing this because the communication from Government has been needlessly complicated and incomplete.

Regional communities need the Government to publish transparent information about which clinics will start administering vaccinations and when. And where there are communities that will not be serviced by a vaccination clinic, we need to know this information, and we need to know what contingency plans the Government is putting in place to ensure universal and equitable access for regional Australians.

Thirdly, frontline healthcare workers are not being vaccinated quickly enough.

I am deeply alarmed at many local instances of frontline healthcare workers not being able to access vaccinations. I have heard from local ICU nurses and residential aged care workers unable to book in for a second dose of Pfizer, and hospital staff being given no advice about how they can get vaccinated or being made to travel hours to access a vaccine.

There are still many frontline healthcare workers in my electorate who were supposed to be in Phase 1a who have not been able to be vaccinated. As we move into winter, it is not acceptable to still have not completed Phase 1a. We cannot have aged care workers and ICU nurses being unvaccinated. The Government needs to urgently expedite the completion of Phase 1a.

Fourth, we need the Government to set a timeline and communication plan for vaccinating the country.

I understand that the changed advice regarding the AstraZeneca vaccine has thrown the Government's rollout plans significantly off course. The medical advice was obviously beyond the Government's control and I commend the Government for making the strong decision to follow the medical advice in changing the guidance for AstraZeneca.

But the prospect that basing our entire vaccination program on one or two vaccines would leave us vulnerable to a situation like this was entirely foreseeable. The failure of the Government to secure timely access to a diverse portfolio of vaccines can now be seen as significant and calamitous.

But my immediate concern is that the Government has now shirked responsibility for articulating a new rollout strategy. It is not acceptable to leave the nation without a timeline and a target for when the rollout will be complete. Industries like hospitality, agriculture, and tourism – which are critical to Indi's economy – rely on the normalisation of international travel which will only be possible once the vaccine rollout is substantially complete.

Our regional economy cannot be held hostage to the Government's refusal to have a clear strategy. The public understands that in a pandemic, unforeseen events will derail the best laid plans. But they will not accept the Government simply shirking its duty. I urge you to develop and publish a new timeline for the vaccine rollout, to provide the certainty our economy needs.

Fifth, the Government must stop politicising the vaccine rollout.

I have been completely dismayed to see senior Government Ministers publicly and recklessly criticising State Governments about the status of the vaccine rollout. It is totally unacceptable for Federal Government Ministers to undermine public confidence in the rollout by sowing conflict like this. It needlessly scares and confuses people.

At the same time, the Government's refusal to disclose basic information about, for instance, the number of vaccines of each type that are in the country, strikes me as needlessly and damagingly secretive.

I believe that both the Government and the nation would be well-served by the Government starting to treat this as a technical public policy challenge to be solved, rather than a political problem to be managed.

Australia has a proud record in public health, we have all the skills and resources we need to succeed in this. And succeed we must.

Yours faithfully,



Dr Helen Haines MP
Independent Federal Member for Indi

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