

Lockdown 2.0 – same, but very different

Back we go into lockdown. But this time the public mood is much less tolerant. People are angrier. Because 16 months in, we still don't have the settings right. Because it didn't have to be this way, if Australia had got vaccine procurement right from the start.

There is only one way out of this: vaccinations. Better quarantine arrangements, better public health orders – all important, but none of that will do the job here, the virus is too transmissible.

Any quarantine arrangements will let some transmissions slip through. The only way the cycle of repeat lockdowns ends, the only we really unleash the recovery, is to get everyone vaccinated. This needs to be the core focus of state and federal government, beyond everything else that they do.

Australia's biggest mistake was not [purchasing enough vaccines](#). Compared to world leading countries, Australia did not place bets on enough different vaccines, did not place orders early enough, [took too long to approve the vaccines](#), and likely did not pay enough to secure supplies earlier.

More recently, telling people not to take the AstraZeneca vaccine, when that was the only one available, was a grave error because the risks of blood clots are so low when compared with the risks of continued Covid-19 outbreaks. This decision added months to the vaccine rollout.

The roll out now needs near perfect execution. Criticising the mechanics of the roll out is off the mark at this point, with the exception of the aged care and disability sector, because the problem is simply that there is not enough vaccine to roll out. But later, when supply increases, the roll out could become the constraint.

As supplies increase, we want to see a massive, highly coordinated roll out led by the state government, to get jabs in arms as fast as possible.

We need a plan for overcoming vaccine hesitancy. Again, for now the constraint is supply. But looking ahead, we will hit a point where people who are eager to get vaccinated have already done so, and we face a remainder of the population, likely XX to YY % [needs link to source] who are hesitant.

Like most countries, Australia requires children to have a range of vaccinations before they are allowed to go to school. This is not just a matter of personal preference. Choosing to remain unvaccinated risks everyone else's health by blocking population herd immunity. That is why school kids are expected to be vaccinated.

That points the way forward for Covid-19: not an outright law that forces people to get vaccinated, but an escalating set of limits that tie access to employment, education, childcare, sport and travel to vaccination. Once vaccines have been offered to the entire population, we need to treat people who have been vaccinated differently, creating a stronger incentive to get vaccinated.

People who continue to suffer economically need Commonwealth income support. Those of us lucky enough to be able to work remotely must remember that while the lockdown may be frustrating, even traumatic, it is not an existential threat. For people who must do their jobs in person, the health risks are far higher. For people who lose their income, the consequences may be even more profound.

Through 2020, JobKeeper and the higher rate of JobSeeker kept people safe and out of poverty. The absence of those programs worries us deeply.

We will almost certainly face repeated lockdowns until the population is vaccinated. The greater transmissibility of the delta variant coupled with the inevitability of quarantine breaches, means full recovery cannot happen yet. We need federal income replacement to take the place of JobKeeper, or targeted support to struggling businesses, to keep businesses and individuals afloat.

The NSW Government is doing a good job. They are doing their absolute best to keep people safe, while minimising the social and economic fallout. As much as it hurts to say it, this lockdown is necessary.

That doesn't mean the state government has done everything right. Clearly it is inexcusable to have [quarantine transport arrangements that allowed an unvaccinated driver](#) to slip through the cracks. But on the whole, we remain confident.

A year ago, we were so proud of Australia's Covid-19 response on health and economic management. The Committee's first Covid-19 recovery plan, in May 2020 [confirm], called out the opportunity of using Australia's success to reposition the country on a world stage – to attract inbound investment, talent and international students.

That feels sadly outdated, even hubristic today. The US and the UK, which so badly bungled the early stages of Covid-19, have come to the rescue with the vaccines the rest of us will use, and have long-since finished vaccinating the majority of their populations.

While the rest of the world has re-opened, Australia has been forced to remain in a bunker. Politicians have urged on the fear of foreign contamination as a cheap way to earn votes. It has not been our finest hour.

We will get through this. It's deeply frustrating but Sydneysiders are going to pull together to take care of one another, just like Australians everywhere have done for the past 16



months. We have everything we need to keep the economy going while we manage through the public health crisis.

Australia has the opportunity to get its vaccination program back on track, and the opportunity to change its messaging about reopening to the world. We are far from the final siren on this game.