

Vaccines alone won't keep Australia COVID-safe

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High levels of testing, efficient vaccine distribution and addressing pandemic mental health impacts are critical if Australia is to maintain control over COVID-19 in 2021, the country's learned body for health and medical sciences has concluded.

The Australian Academy of Health and Medical Sciences (AAHMS), an independent body comprising more than 400 senior researchers, has released a report spelling out the necessary next steps for [pandemic](#) response in the new year.

"By any global measure the Australian approach has been a spectacular success," said University of Sydney infectious diseases researcher, Professor Tania Sorrell, who chaired the committee that produced the report.

"But this has come at significant cost and, as the second wave in Victoria showed, success can be very fragile."

Maintaining control—and avoiding the huge [health](#) and [economic costs](#) that would accompany a resurgence of the virus—will require a suite of strong public health and policy measures from federal, state and territory governments.

"Reported [vaccine](#) results of 90% effectiveness and above are encouraging," said one of the co-authors, University of Queensland immunologist Professor Ian Frazer.

"But these vaccines will need an enormous effort to manufacture, transport, store and administer across Australia. And that is going to take a lot of time—very likely, deep into 2021. If we let our guard down before that, the virus will get away from us again."

The AAHMS review concludes that Australia's best strategy must combine:

- ongoing implementation of comprehensive public health measures, including high levels of testing combined with contact tracing, isolation, quarantine, social distancing and mask-

wearing;

- optimal roll-out of vaccines and other interventions as they become available;
- effective prevention and treatment of long-term health issues arising from the pandemic, including [mental health](#) and "long" COVID;
- support to other countries in the region;
- sustained and enhanced backing for research and innovation to develop the tools required to tackle the pandemic.

Professor Frazer is well-versed in the obstacles inherent in developing vaccine-based approaches to global health challenges. In 1991, he and virologist Jian Zhou successfully developed the world's first vaccine against human papillomavirus (HPV), the primary cause of cervical cancer.

"Australia's capacity to deliver effective public health programs, together with our world class research and innovation sector, mean that we are well placed to execute this agenda," he said.

"Doing so successfully will also future-proof us, improving our ability to respond to other pandemics if and when they arise."

The Australian Academy of Health and Medical Sciences is the impartial, authoritative, cross-sector voice of health and medical science in Australia, an independent, interdisciplinary body of Australia's leading minds in the health and medical sciences.

More information: Australian Academy of Health and Medical Sciences urges multi-pronged response for 2021. aahms.org/news/aahms-report-2021-covid/

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(AAHMS)

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