

Former health minister Greg Hunt slams state governments for Covid overreach without medical advice

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jess malcolm

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Former health minister Greg Hunt has hit out at states and territories over “unilateral” health decisions taken during the pandemic that were not backed by medical advice, recommending all jurisdictions be forced to formally commit to a new national code mandating all medical advice be published.

In a submission to the federal [government’s inquiry into Covid](#), Mr Hunt was critical of [actions taken by premiers](#) that were not the subject of commonwealth advice nor the advice of their chief medical officers.

Mr Hunt hit out at Victoria in particular over decisions taken by former premier Daniel Andrews to implement stringent curfews, a 5km radius as well as the state’s choice not to use ADF personnel at hotel quarantine facilities.

“Subsequent unilateral decisions of some states outside of the national cabinet framework, such as Victoria’s curfews or 5km movement restrictions, were not the subject of commonwealth advice and nor to the best of my knowledge has the medical advice for such restrictions been released or affirmed at state level,” he said.

Mr Hunt urged premiers and chief ministers to commit to not taking “unilateral decisions against national cabinet decisions unless there is published and signed medical advice”.

Mr Hunt suggested Australia's presumption of individual freedom was under threat without a formal commitment from the states to avoid unilateral decision making, recommending all state leaders adopt a uniform national code for pandemic management mandating medical advice be published for any restrictive measures.

While this was not legally required for Mr Hunt under the nation's biosecurity laws, he said the routine publication of medical advice underpinning policy changes during the pandemic was a practice the former Coalition government adopted, and recommended the Biosecurity Act be amended.

Mr Hunt, who is expected to appear in front of the inquiry's panel on Thursday, also urged the federal government to implement a public awareness campaign for booster shots, and warned rates of immunisation had plunged. Indigenous booster rates had fallen significantly since mid-2022.

The independent panel overseeing the 12-month inquiry includes chair and retired public service boss Robyn Kruk, epidemiologist Catherine Bennett and economist Angela Jackson.

The former cabinet minister also said there had been a 163 per cent increase in recorded Covid-19 deaths in aged care since Labor took office in May 2022, calling on the Albanese government to implement a five-year aged care plan to manage the virus.

"One concern is that despite Covid-19 having transitioned from pandemic to endemic status, in the period from May 19, 2022, to March 21, 2024 resident deaths in aged care have increased by 3947, or 163 per cent," Mr Hunt said.



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“This indicates the need for ... support in the form of PPE, infection control and training, workforce support and vaccination support for staff and residents.”

Mr Hunt said the four most significant decisions taken by the Morrison government during the pandemic were closing the border with China, the establishment of universal Telehealth and the integration of the private hospital system within the public sector, the national vaccine manufacturing program, and economic stimulus initiatives including JobKeeper and JobSeeker.

Mr Hunt said the commonwealth’s decision to close its border with China was fundamental to helping Australia achieve one of the lowest rates of loss of life globally, calling it “the most important peacetime decision taken by any Australian government since World War II”.

According to analysis of his records, Mr Hunt said he attended approximately 50 high-level decision-making meetings relating to Covid in March 2020 – underscoring the importance of co-ordination between all levels of government during the pandemic – and gave about 65 press conferences and media interviews.

“Ultimately, Covid-19 was a global pandemic with immense pain, suffering and loss, both within Australia and globally.

“No country escaped unharmed; however, very few countries emerged with a lower loss of life and less economic damage than Australia.

“The findings of the March 2024 global burden of disease study which showed Australia increased life expectancy in 2020 and 2021 by 0.2 years while the global average decreased 1.6 years is the single most important and telling assessment of how Australia fared relative to other countries.”

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