



Australian Government

Department of Health

Chief Medical Officer

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Dear xx

The emergence of the highly transmissible Omicron variant and exponential increase in cases has significantly impacted our public health resources. In a higher caseload environment where resources are strained, public health resources and clinical vigilance need to be directed to identification of cases most at risk of infection and/or severe disease, and settings where there are people at risk of severe disease.

Accurate information on deaths is key to informing proportionate outbreak responses, including ensuring appropriate allocation of resources to vulnerable populations, and guiding vaccination strategies. There is an obligation to ensure completeness of the national minimum case dataset, as agreed by AHPPC, especially for deaths.

Australians are also seeking to understand who is at greatest risk of severe disease and death following infection with COVID-19. This information is important so individuals can keep themselves, or someone they care about, safe. It also allows us to target interventions and messaging to those that need our help most.

The jurisdictional data on deaths that informs your daily reports and your public health response is necessary to communicate at the national level to better understand disease severity and the impacts of our interventions. The data will support us to refine efforts where needed and ensure the most vulnerable are protected.

We must rapidly work together to vastly improve our understanding of what is happening in our at-risk settings, especially in residential aged care and disability settings. This has to be the priority. Without this information, it is difficult to intervene effectively to support our most vulnerable Australians.

My department is seeking more detailed data from your jurisdictions on people dying with COVID--19. We are particularly requesting information about vaccination status, the exposure setting (such as a residential aged care facility or disability setting) and comorbidities, as well as whether the person identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

I understand that you are dealing with systems under strain and high case and reporting burdens however I am requesting that you provide any data that you have on deaths as soon as possible to the department **through NNIDSS**.

We have an opportunity to strengthen our communicable diseases surveillance system to ensure we have the evidence base needed to inform our responses for the future with COVID-19 or a large influenza season. We have an opportunity now to establish systems and processes that streamline data collection across the health system. We need to capitalise on the gains we have made in the last two years otherwise momentum and appetite will wane and the opportunity will be wasted.

Yours sincerely

Professor Paul Kelly
Chief Medical Officer

[Month] [Year] (Please type the month in full)

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