

Australian epidemiologists call for global action to eliminate COVID-19

Richard Phillips
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Three senior epidemiologists in Australia—Guy Marks, Brendan Crabb and Raina MacIntyre—have issued an urgent appeal entitled “Backed by Science: Here’s How We Can Eliminate COVID-19.”

The statement, which was published on Sunday by *Health Policy Watch*, calls for sustained and globally coordinated action to eliminate the deadly virus. It was posted amid an unprecedented surge of COVID infections across Australia which is overwhelming hospitals, aged-care facilities and ambulance services, and leading to shortages of Rapid Antigen Tests and ongoing delays in the provision of “booster” vaccines and the inoculation of school-age children.

The document challenges the escalating barrage of government and mainstream media claims that Omicron is “mild,” that society must “live with the virus,” and that herd immunity can be achieved by “let it rip” policies. These unscientific assertions serve only to justify policies that place corporate profits above health and lives.

Marks is Scientia Professor of Respiratory Medicine at the University of New South Wales and president of the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease. Professor Crabb is an infectious disease researcher and Burnet Institute CEO, as well as chair of the Australian Global Health Alliance and the Pacific Friends of Global Health. MacIntyre is Professor of Global Biosecurity at the Kirby Institute, University of New South Wales.

Drawing historical parallels, the scientists’ document begins: “At the outbreak of World War 1 in August 1914, enthusiastic patriots on both sides were assured it would be over by Christmas. At the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic in January 2020, there was a general assumption that life would be back to normal by Easter. In neither case did events pan out that way.

War-weariness and its modern equivalent, pandemic-weariness, have set in.

“Each time there is a new wave of the pandemic, there is a strong desire to believe that if we can just get past this crisis, things will be better, the pandemic will come to an end and we can return to a normal life. Those hopes have peaked again recently with predictions from some quarters of a ‘reprieve’ after the peak of the Omicron crisis passes.”

This sort of “optimism is not well-founded” and not “likely to become a reality,” Marks, Crabb and MacIntyre warn, as they reject ongoing government claims that it is possible to “live with the virus.” Such assertions, their document states, are “unjustified and dangerous thinking” as is clearly demonstrated by the fact that “hospital systems the world over, are overwhelmed” with Omicron-infected patients.

The document points out that evidence from the four waves of COVID-19 during the last two years shows that “neither natural infection with SARS-CoV-2 nor vaccination leads to sustained protection against COVID-19. Hence, long-term protective herd immunity cannot be achieved by ‘letting it rip.’ Over time the community will again become susceptible to the next wave...

“Massive numbers of people affected in non-immune populations, together with chronic infection in some immunosuppressed individuals, increase the risk of new variants emerging. Natural selection, the biological basis of evolution, means that variants that are ‘successful’ will be even more transmissible than the current dominant strains.

“Whenever uncontrolled transmission is occurring somewhere in the world, new SARS-CoV-2 variants that can escape from existing immunity and cause a further global wave of COVID-19 disease will continue

to arise across the world,” the document says.

The only solution, the medical scientists state, is concerted, simultaneous and internationally-coordinated elimination action involving an equitable global distribution of vaccinations, combined with a range of public health and safety measures. These include “universal use of well-fitted N95 masks indoors and in close-contact outdoor environments, effective ventilation and filtration of indoor environments, and effective implementation of testing, tracing, isolation and quarantine (TTIQ) procedures using sophisticated AI-enabled tools....”

As the document concludes, “We will need international cooperation at the highest level to design and implement this ‘vaccine plus’ strategy, simultaneously, across the planet... With a commitment to global elimination, we will need a quantum advance in supporting such a multi-lateral approach. Living with COVID-19 is not working.

“A commitment to reducing numbers is our only way out. The longer we wait to shift gears and raise ourselves from our pandemic-weariness, the harder it will be. We need to look beyond the current wave. Rather than cross our fingers with a one-dimensional-vaccine only strategy, and a grossly inequitable one at that, we need to do the hard work to end the pandemic. The benefits of an elimination approach will come much quicker than people think; just halving COVID-19’s impact would change the world.”

This urgent and powerful appeal by some of Australia’s most acclaimed epidemiologists is another manifestation of the growing opposition of principled medical scientists, doctors and health workers at every level to the murderous profit-driven response of governments and big business to the pandemic.

Predictably, “Backed by Science: Here’s How We Can Eliminate COVID-19” has been ignored by the Australian media. In line with the federal and state governments’ dumping of even limited COVID-19 mitigation measures and their criminal campaign to reopen schools and other unsafe workplaces, no news outlet has reported the existence of the statement.

In its place is the constant newspeak of media commentators and government officials claiming that the Omicron variant is mild and insisting, without any evidence, that infections have or will shortly peak. The massive crisis hitting the under-resourced hospital

system is ignored or denied. The endless barrage, full of evidence-free and often self-contradictory assertions, is simply politically-motivated propaganda.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has explained, the fight to eliminate COVID-19 and its variant is not purely a medical issue but requires the development of a mass independent movement of the working class, fighting for a society in which human life takes precedence over big business profits.

This perspective underpins the Global Workers Inquest into the pandemic, initiated by the WSWS. In alliance with principled medical scientists, its aim is to educate workers and young people, scientifically and politically, so that they can take the actions necessary to save lives and end the pandemic. We urge medical scientists, doctors and health workers to contact the WSWS to discuss their experiences and concerns and participate in this fight.



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