



**The Hon Anika Wells MP**  
**Minister for Aged Care**  
**Minister for Sport**  
**Acting Minister for Health and Aged Care**  
**Member for Lilley**

Ref No: MC23-014768

Ms Susan Templeman MP  
Chair  
Standing Committee on Petitions  
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Dear Chair

Thank you for your correspondence of 1 August 2023 to the Minister for Health and Aged Care, the Hon Mark Butler MP, regarding Petition EN5149 asking the House of Representatives to create a Royal Commission into COVID-19 vaccine-related deaths. I am responding as the Acting Minister for Health and Aged Care.

I appreciate that the petitioners are very concerned about COVID-19 vaccine-related deaths. However, there is no credible evidence that COVID-19 vaccines have contributed to excess deaths in Australia. While I will outline several sources to support this position below, I would first like to provide some general information about COVID-19 vaccine safety and monitoring conducted by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), which is part of the Department of Health and Aged Care.

Vaccination against COVID-19 is the most effective way to reduce severe illness, hospitalisation, and death from infection. Evidence from more than 13 billion vaccine doses given worldwide shows that COVID-19 vaccines have a very good safety profile in all age groups. The protective benefits of vaccination far outweigh the potential risks.

The TGA has a well-established and robust system in place to capture reports of suspected adverse events for all vaccines. Many of these processes have been enhanced dramatically for COVID-19 vaccines, making this the most intense safety monitoring of therapeutic goods ever conducted in Australia.

The TGA reviews all deaths reported in people post-administration of a COVID-19 vaccine. Their analysis of individual reports and patterns of reporting does not suggest that the vaccines played a causal role in most of these cases.

The TGA also reports on deaths related to COVID-19 vaccines transparently and accurately. Since March 2021, they have regularly and publicly reported on COVID-19 vaccine safety monitoring at [www.tga.gov.au/news/covid-19-vaccine-safety-reports](http://www.tga.gov.au/news/covid-19-vaccine-safety-reports). This report includes details on the number of deaths reported to the TGA, as well as the outcomes of the assessment of those reports.

In relation to excess deaths in Australia, recent analysis from the Actuaries Institute found excess mortality remained high in 2022, even after the exclusion of deaths from and with COVID-19 infection.<sup>1</sup> The number of vaccine doses administered in 2022 was approximately half that given in 2021, which clearly indicates that there is not a strong temporal or causal relationship between vaccination and excess mortality. The analysis also reported that most excess deaths occurred in older people (over 65 years of age). The analysis identified that the most likely contributing factors to excess mortality in 2022 were the impact of COVID-19 on subsequent risk of death, particularly from heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and dementia, which have all been identified in studies; delays in emergency care during peak COVID-19 and influenza infections; and delays in routine care of non-COVID-19 diseases, such as disruption of medications for people with heart disease.

Additionally, an as-yet unpublished analysis from Australia's National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance reported on a large, nation-wide study that included 3.8 million Australians aged 65 years or over. This study found that a recent COVID-19 vaccine was associated with a reduction in deaths from COVID-19 infection, but also deaths from any cause.<sup>2</sup>

Lastly, review of the patterns in cause of death also does not suggest a relationship with patterns of population vaccination. In the analysis conducted by the Actuaries Institute, the cause of death with the highest proportion of excess deaths was ischaemic heart disease,<sup>1</sup> which is predominantly a longer-term health condition that evolves over time. Ischaemic heart disease is the leading cause of death in Australia, with the proportion of deaths attributed to chronic ischaemic heart disease increasing since 2019.<sup>3</sup> Between 2018 and 2021, there was no change in the 5 most common causes of death in Australia, and diabetes has also remained in the top 10 causes of death.<sup>4</sup> The only change in 2022 was COVID-19 becoming the third most common cause of death. This unchanged pattern in causes of death also does not support a link between vaccination and excess deaths.

Thank you for writing on this matter.

Yours sincerely

Anika Wells

23 August 2023

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<sup>1</sup> [www.actuaries.digital/2023/04/06/covid-19-mortality-working-group-confirmation-of-20000-excess-deaths-for-2022-in-australia/](https://www.actuaries.digital/2023/04/06/covid-19-mortality-working-group-confirmation-of-20000-excess-deaths-for-2022-in-australia/)

<sup>2</sup> Preprint available at: [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=4445191](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4445191)

<sup>3</sup> [www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/causes-death/provisional-mortality-statistics/jan-dec-2022](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/causes-death/provisional-mortality-statistics/jan-dec-2022)

<sup>4</sup> [www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/causes-death/causes-death-australia/2021](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/causes-death/causes-death-australia/2021)