



Hon Yvette D'Ath MP  
Minister for Health and Ambulance Services  
Leader of the House

16 SEP 2022

1 William Street Brisbane Qld 4000  
GPO Box 48 Brisbane  
Queensland 4001 Australia  
Telephone +61 7 3035 6100

Mr Neil Laurie  
Clerk of the Parliament  
Queensland Parliament  
George Street  
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

I write in response to petition number 3772-22, tabled in Parliament on 17 August 2022, in relation to the reintroduction of COVID-19 measures to protect the community from the spread of the virus.

COVID-19 is a deadly virus that has caused a tragic loss of life, not just in Queensland, but around the world. My thoughts are with the families of those who have lost loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic.

From March 2020 to now, Queensland's pandemic response has necessarily shifted. Over the first 21 months of the pandemic Queensland was focused on eliminating COVID-19 from our community to protect our state from the significant public health, social and economic risks associated with COVID-19. Implementing border closures, movement restrictions, vaccination requirements, and broadly mandating mask wearing provided the time needed to ensure that every eligible Queenslanders had the opportunity to be vaccinated before the virus circulated widely in our community.

From December 2021, with high vaccination coverage, the public health response transitioned from elimination to suppression with a strong focus on monitoring and protecting vulnerable populations and health system capacity. Unfortunately, and tragically, widespread COVID-19 transmission within our community has seen an increased number of deaths compared with the first phase of the pandemic. The extraordinarily low death rate that Queensland experienced prior to 21 December 2021 was never going to be sustainable once Queensland reopened its border. This decision to reopen the border was not taken lightly and was done safely so as to ensure the impact of the spread of COVID-19 on the community was limited to the greatest extent possible.

The opening of the border coincided with the emergence of the highly infectious Omicron variant and its subvariants, being BA.2, BA.4 and BA.5. These subvariants have tested Queensland's pandemic response and I am very proud of the way our community and health system have responded. The Chief Health Officer has not needed to restrict people's movements, close borders, or mandate masks across all of Queensland like we did before because Queenslanders have listened to the health advice and made their own choice to protect themselves and their loved ones, particularly vulnerable people, from the risk of COVID-19.

Where there is an increased public health risk measures are still mandated under the public health directions. For example, the Chief Health Officer continues to mandate masks in settings where there is a higher risk of the spread of COVID-19. This includes on public transport, in aged care facilities, hospitals and disability accommodation, and in commercial passenger vehicles like taxis.

As our community continues to deal with the spread of COVID-19 and we move out of the pandemic response, there will continue to be less restrictions. This is an important step in returning to normal after the unprecedented events of the past two and a half years. During this transition, vaccination remains one of the best measures an individual can take to protect themselves from death and severe disease. Vaccination has always been our pathway out of this pandemic, and it continues to be so today.

The Chief Health Officer and I strongly encourage all Queenslanders to remain up-to-date with COVID-19 vaccination and to take whatever steps they consider necessary to personally manage the spread of COVID-19, whether that is choosing to wear a mask in indoor crowded spaces, maintaining hand and respiratory hygiene, or staying home when unwell, all of these personal measures are important.

I trust this information is of assistance to the petitioners.

Yours sincerely



**YVETTE D'ATH MP**  
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