

## Messaging key to ending winter COVID crisis

**T**he decision last week by the health regulator ATAGI to approve a fourth COVID-19 shot for anybody aged 30 or over is significant for two reasons. First it is vital if we are to “live with COVID” successfully that Australians keep their vaccinations up to date, particularly as the efficacy of the first and second shots – now several months old for many of us – starts to decline. Second, it is a welcome sign that with case numbers stubbornly high the authorities are finally acting with some urgency to forestall a crippling outbreak fuelled by the Omicron BA.4 and BA.5 sub-variants and seasonal conditions that could match the worst of what we saw in January.

It's almost bewildering how quickly we went from a nation baying for blood when Novak Djokovic arrived in Melbourne in January with an incomplete vaccination status to barely caring about COVID at all by the time of the May federal election, when only 1 per cent of those polled in the ABC's Vote Compass survey rated the pandemic an important issue.

Vaccines have – rightly – made us feel safer and public messaging has increasingly told us that COVID is now a matter of personal, not government, responsibility, even if it has, ironically, made us worry less when perhaps we should have worried more.

It's understandable that after two and a half years we just want the whole thing to go away, perhaps suffering from what the World Health Organisation calls “pandemic fatigue”, less and less motivated to follow health advice or even to stay informed about the effects of COVID. The trouble is, as we all know when we can bear to engage with it, COVID won't just go away. It is wily, persistent, adaptable and determined. And the numbers suggest it is more successful than ever, with 256,000 active cases across Australia on Friday, 3977 in hospital and the death toll relentlessly ticking on past the 10,000 milestone reached last week.

Living with COVID has come to mean accepting into our lives a virus that is on track in 2022 to kill more people than anything other than heart disease. Unlike heart disease, it is contagious, which means its reach extends well beyond those who become seriously ill to affect the livelihoods of many more. Is there a school, workplace or sporting club in the land COVID does not currently affect?

Yes, many of those who contract it have mild symptoms but an unfortunate few go down hard. Nor does catching it confer immunity, as we used to hope – reinfection is not uncommon among the 8 million Australians now estimated to have had the virus. “Long” COVID can be debilitating. Business leaders are concerned about the long-term effects on the economy caused by staff shortages and disruptions.

With an election on the horizon in NSW, it is unlikely Premier Dominic Perrottet has much appetite to stir up memories of the pandemic's darkest days. But neither can he just wish COVID away. The federal government at least has some clear air and it is encouraging it has launched a six-week, \$11 million advertising campaign to promote uptake of both COVID and flu vaccines. Yet more must be done to encourage people to wear masks in crowded, indoor spaces, more people to test when they have symptoms, more people to isolate when sick and when exposed.

It won't be easy, but the challenge is to raise awareness and maintain the good habits learnt in the first two years of the pandemic by appealing to good sense, rather than through high-handed demands. The way forward is no longer about command and control, but about winning hearts and minds.

## The Sun-Herald

## VINTAGE GOLDING



## Destroying bees a sad necessity

Having to stand by and watch these socially minded, superbly organised animals, who support the livelihoods of affected beekeepers, be euthanised must be a terribly distressing experience (“Beekeepers count their losses as devastating mite threat spreads”, July 3). Undoubtedly farmers of previously likewise condemned live stock, such as sheep, cows and pigs, must have also experienced the same degree of tragic loss and personal anguish.

Could it be the inspirational, well-organised social nature of the humble bee and the outbreak that adds a degree to the outbreak's disastrous depth? We can learn so much socially from the structural behaviour of bees.

Hopefully, science and good governance and individual constraint of keepers will combine creatively to ensure a more prosperous future for an effective timely rebound.

Cleveland Rose, Deo Why

### Park idea falls short

The plan that national parks in NSW will be placed under Indigenous control sounds worthy, but the process is to take up to 20 years and there is no mention of increasing the present number of parks, or protecting sensitive areas of importance for survival of native fauna and habitat (“Parks estate to be placed back in Indigenous hands”, July 3). The relaxation of environmental protection laws under this state government has meant too many of our native forests have been seriously damaged or destroyed in order to placate forestry and agricultural demands. By all means increase Indigenous control of present parks, but this should not be, as it appears, a distraction from the need to re-establish strong environmental protection laws that

### Mum's the word

“Mumslaining” may be rampant but I rely upon it (“Shhh! Let wisdom and wonder fall from the mouth of babes”, July 7). I'm pretty sure other people's children speak Swahili until the age of five.

Col Burns, Lugarno

have been seriously eroded under this conservative government.

Nola Tucker, Kiama

### Voice must be heard

Congratulations on a fine editorial to mark the beginning of NAIDOC Week (“Listen to the nation's Heart – hear it's Voice”, July 3). May I respectfully add a reminder that there is only one race, the human race, and we stand or fall together on how we treat each other. For far too long the rights of First Nations people have been trampled, their graciousness disdained and their suffering ignored. It's time for we later-comers to put up and shut up, pay the rent and listen to the Voice.

Meredith Williams, Northmead

### Focus on unfairness

The right to abortion is not under threat in Australia, and the seemingly young crowd protesting following the Roe v Wade case in the United States would have been better served protesting about how they are being screwed by a taxation system that is biased in favour of the older wealthy class (“Sydney'siders rally to defend abortion rights”, July 3).

Think superannuation tax breaks, negative gearing's full deductions for losses to only half the capital gain being taxable – why else do people

negatively gear? – and soon the election promise to increase the income test for the Seniors Health Card from \$57,761 (individual) and \$92,416 (couple) to \$90,000 and \$114,000 respectively.

This largesse is not free but is paid from the taxes levied on the younger working generation.

Maurice Critchley, Mangrove Mountain

### Take cosmetic care

Improving cosmetic surgery patient safety can only be achieved by ensuring that any doctor performing such work is trained and competent in its practice (“Real risk: Breast implant complications rise if doctor not a specialist surgeon”, June 19). Specialist surgical qualification is no guarantee. In three years to mid-2021, the Senate inquiry reported from the regulator AHPRA that 52 per cent of practitioners who were the subject of complaints concerning “botched surgeries”, and specifically cosmetic procedures, were specialist surgeons and “mostly specialist plastic surgeons”. This follows the AMC, the independent national standards body that assesses the training and education programs of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, recently concluding that, in relation to cosmetic surgery, plastic surgeons qualify, having had “a deficit in experience available” and with “a gap in this area of practice”. The ACCSM advocates that under s.98 of national law, all medical practitioners undertaking cosmetic surgery be independently “endorsed” in this area of practice by AHPRA as having met and maintained a national accreditation standard in cosmetic surgery and be identifiable on a public register.

Jenny Vallance, general manager, Board of the Australasian College of Cosmetic Surgery and Medicine

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## Published - Sydney Morning Herald - 10 July 2022

Letter to the Editor

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