Pharmaceutical Society of Australia

Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee

Inquiry into appropriate terms of reference for a COVID-19 Royal Commission

Jan
2024

Purpose

The Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) makes this submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee for Inquiry into appropriate terms of reference for a COVID-19 Royal Commission.

The terms of reference for the inquiry is as follows:

> *Noting that a fully empowered Royal Commission with appropriate terms of reference is necessary to learn from the unprecedented government response to COVID-19:*
>
> > *The appropriate terms of reference for a COVID-19 Royal Commission that would allow all affected stakeholders to be heard.*

About PSA

PSA is the only Australian Government-recognised peak national professional pharmacy organisation representing all of Australia's 36,000 pharmacists working in all sectors and across all locations.

PSA is committed to supporting pharmacists in helping Australians to access quality, safe, equitable, efficient and effective health care. PSA believes the expertise of pharmacists can be better utilised to address the healthcare needs of all Australians.

PSA works to identify, unlock and advance opportunities for pharmacists to realise their full potential, to be appropriately recognised and fairly remunerated.

PSA has a strong and engaged membership base that provides high-quality health care and are the custodians for safe and effective medicine use for the Australian community.

PSA leads and supports innovative and evidence-based healthcare service delivery by pharmacists. PSA provides high-quality practitioner development and practice support to pharmacists and is the custodian of the professional practice standards and guidelines to ensure quality and integrity in the practice of pharmacy.

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Proposed clauses for terms of reference

To allow all affected stakeholders to be heard by a COVID-19 Royal Commission, the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) suggests the following for inclusion in the terms of reference:

a. Recognise the inquiry as a genuine opportunity for reflection and learning and, where warranted, to provide progressive recommendations for reform for future healthcare sector safety, efficiency and responsiveness.

b. Review the adequacy and effectiveness of measures employed by commonwealth and state/territory health-related departments and agencies to support the health and wellbeing of frontline and institutional healthcare professionals and workers, including availability of personal protective equipment.

c. Review the consultation opportunities afforded and timelines implemented by government departments for peak professional bodies to advise on proposed public health response measures and to assist with the dissemination of key messages and provision of health practitioner support.

d. Recognising that access to medicines is routinely one of the top three issues of concern for patients and carers during public health emergencies, review commonwealth and state/territory arrangements for medicine subsidy, prescribing, dispensing and distribution with respect to timeliness and equitable access for all Australians.

e. Review legislative barriers relating to the professional practice of pharmacists which restricted their ability to provide essential medicines to patients in a safe and timely manner, and for continuity of treatment.

f. Assess the effectiveness of measures implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic to prioritise equity of access for people needing essential medicines and to prevent stockpiling.

g. Review the impact of jurisdictional (state/territory) differences in implementing commonwealth medicine-related measures on patients and the public, as well as healthcare professionals.

h. Examine the effectiveness of planning and rollout of COVID-19 vaccination services across primary care, aged care and disability care settings.

i. Review the effectiveness of Therapeutic Goods Administration approval processes for point-of-care tests (e.g. COVID-19 rapid antigen tests (home use self-tests)) and appropriateness of supply channels and distribution arrangements, including the COVID-19 Rapid Test Concessional Access (CRTCA) Program.

j. Review the adequacy of workforce and business support for healthcare organisations and essential service providers that continued to operate throughout public health emergencies.

k. Conduct an analysis and update of governments' responses to recommendations arising from COVID-19 related inquiries and progress on the implementation of accepted recommendations.

l. Assess the level and adequacy of reform of current health sector policies and medicine-related measures in ensuring preparedness to deal with future public health emergencies rather than having to implement changes after an emergency event has occurred.