

# Our vaccine rollout is a disaster

The federal government can no longer claim things are going well. States must play a greater role.



Steven Hamilton, Richard Holden

Australia's vaccine rollout has so far been an unmitigated disaster. It is untenable for the federal government to continue to pretend it is going well. We started months after the US, Britain, the EU and many others. And now that our long-overdue program has finally begun, we've administered only half as many shots per head of population as other countries at the six-week mark.

If the first step in solving any problem is recognising that there is one, the second is having a plan on how to proceed. The reality is we've delivered a job to only about 2 per cent of Australians, while Britain and the US are at 46 per cent and 30 per cent, respectively.

This week, a war of words erupted between the federal government and the states over who is to blame. The feds say they've given the states thousands of doses they haven't administered. The states say they haven't been given enough doses with enough notice, nor sufficient guidance on how the rollout is to proceed. To fix our rollout, we need to end the blame game. That fix comes in four parts.

First, the states need full autonomy over how their rollout proceeds. It beggars belief that the level of government that runs our public hospitals hasn't played a bigger role to date. One of the most basic principles of

economics is that to achieve good outcomes, the party with control over an outcome should be accountable for it. The federal government should supply any number of vaccines the states should require. Once delivered, the states should have full discretion as to how they're administered – and should wear the public consequences for underperformance.

Second, with greater state autonomy should come greater federal transparency. Every day, the federal government should announce the quantity and location of every dose delivered to every state. Enough of the mindless homilies about how "it's not a race" and "we're not in a hurry".

The minister and health bureaucrats need to level with us. Take the issue of blood clots potentially associated with the AstraZeneca vaccine. There has been concern about one case involving a 44-year old man in Victoria. But the true magnitude of the risk has not been adequately explained to the public. In Britain, there were 30 reported cases

out of the first 18.1 million jobs delivered. It's far from clear they were caused by the vaccine, but in any event these cases occur at a rate of just 0.00017 per cent. More and clearer information is all we really need to

dampen vaccine hesitancy.

Third, with their newfound autonomy, the states should expand their distribution channels. GPs need to be adequately compensated for being at the front line of the vaccination campaign. It's the fairest of false economies to try and ensure no doctor makes a cent from delivering COVID-19 vaccines. We should err on the side of speed rather than penny-pinching.

But distribution must extend well beyond GPs. If we were to roll out our COVID-19 vaccine at the rate we

administer flu vaccines, we'd be well on our way to vaccinating at the rate of 200,000 a day we need to finish by the end of the year. Just as we do with the flu vaccine, we should roll out COVID-19 vaccines through pharmacies with extreme urgency. And we should also use large public venues like the SCG and MCG to deliver vaccines, as in the US.

Last, the part of the process the federal government is squarely responsible for – vaccine procurement – needs to be radically ramped up, no matter the cost. We need more doses of the high-efficacy vaccines like Pfizer and Moderna, and the relatively high-efficacy and single-shot Johnson and Johnson vaccine.

While Europe has blocked exports of some European-made vaccines, production in the US is beginning to outstrip its domestic consumption and it has been exporting doses to Canada.

Given our special relationship with the US, we should be aggressively pursuing vaccines from this market as well. The government must get more doses of the vaccines now, from wherever it can, and pay whatever price the producers demand. That's the price we pay for being inadequately prepared – but it's well worth paying.

Australia's vaccine rollout has been an abject failure, largely because the roles of the feds and states have been imperfectly and opaquely defined. The quickest way to end the blame game is to make it clear to the public who is to blame and for what. Both the feds and states have an incentive to clear that up. The sooner they do so, the sooner the pace of our rollout can increase tenfold, as it desperately needs to.

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# Rush of blood over brush with wildlife

Meena Evers



When I returned home, the crime scene was not immediately apparent. I unlocked the front door and set down my bag of groceries. It was only after walking through to my back verandah that I saw it. My basil plant had been violently expelled from the planter box and lay lifeless on the floor. The soil scatter primum left me in no doubt as to the prime suspect for this terrible act. It was the work of our neighbourhood brush turkey bandit.

Not content with digging up our new seedlings, raking the ground with his big feet and wreaking destruction below, he had ventured two metres higher up to make his mark. Before Basil (that's what we call him now), the local possum would have been at the top of my list, but he usually snacks on my plants, never digs them up.

Like his friend the possum, the brush turkey is a protected species. Both creatures have driven me to despair. I love living in a leafy suburb and I enjoy the fauna that comes with it, but some of the native wildlife are just downright spiteful. They act as if they understand they are special, strutting around to what I imagine is the tune of MC Hammer's *U Can't Touch This* in their head, like they know this to be true. Not that I want to touch them, or harm them in any way. Although, there was that momentary slip in December when I found myself googling "brush turkey recipes", and "what do brush turkeys taste like", but that was more seasonal curiosity than malice. Honestly.

Some weeks ago, I saw a cute little "quail" dart across my backyard. A text from my neighbour confirmed my fear that it was in fact a brush turkey chick. Basil's baby? Recently, I spotted a gang of six brush turkeys giving another neighbour's front garden landscaping makeover. They wander from property to property. Perhaps they are scouting the neighbourhood looking for the perfect home. There are a number of bushy reserves and nice parks nearby. Hopefully they settle on one of those.

On hearing me rant about Basil and friends, my 10-year-old son sweetly advocated for the brush turkey, reminding me that we humans are the intruders in the brush turkey's environment, not the other way around. Yes, yes, little wise one. We must adapt and work out how to co-exist harmoniously.

For that to happen, somebody needs to change their tune. Unfortunately, I don't think it's going to be the brush turkey.

Meena Evers is a Sydney writer.

# Royal problems won't help republicans

What has come over some republicans? Apparently enthused by the current soap opera clouding the House of Windsor they are planning to release a suggested model for a republic later this year. To infer a correlation between the problems plaguing the royal family and the chance of us voting for a republic is in my view a mistake. It suggests the popularity or otherwise of the royal family is somehow particularly relevant to that issue.

If it's possible to be born with political opinions I was born a republican. If it were about the popularity of officeholders, I might not have been a republican because Queen Elizabeth II took the throne when I was just a year old. She was then, as now, a popular figure. She radiates decency, responsibility and duty. Running a debate on the future of our constitutional arrangements as though it were an episode of *MAFS* is embarrassing. Taking a "they're a bunch of misfits" line is unlikely to win over a monarchist.

Amanda Vanstone



Criticising the royal family or playing to the crowd on their current limitations is just dumb. It will not win over any monarchists. Quite the opposite.

Toss in the well known fact that we are as a nation extremely cautious about voting yes in referenda and big neon lights are spelling out that if you want to change, go the minimalist route.

The reason Australia should become a republic is about us, not the Windsors. Over a few hundred years we have developed from a group of colonies into a nation that can and should stand alone. We should not share a head of state.

We need a head of state who has our interests, and only ours, at heart. Someone who feels our heat, smells our eucalypt. We want someone who not only delights in a magpie's warble but yearns for it. As a country in the Indo-Pacific we should be spelling out to our

neighbours that, like so many of them, have thrown off the last vestiges of colonialism.

Our current constitutional arrangements work fairly well. So why not keep the title governor-general federally and the title governor in the states? The name to me doesn't matter. It's making Australia fully independent that matters.

Then comes the question of how to select a governor-general. The current system has the prime minister recommending a person to the Queen. That system has served us remarkably well. What do people say has been so bad about it? Monarchists and 'direct elect' republicans say we can't trust politicians. This is superficial gibberish. We elect them. We can sack them. The leader of the government effectively chooses the governor-general. In effect we choose who chooses.

Let's not forget that a shocking appointment would blot the record of a prime minister both with the public of the day and in a historical sense. Every prime minister worries about their popularity and their legacy. We have more power

than we perhaps realise. I'd leave as much as we can the same. Yes, I'd let the prime minister sack a governor-general and vice versa. Political pressure and the cold hard reality of it will make that an extraordinarily rare event. As it ought be.

If people want to insist on offering a direct elect model they must convince us that good and decent people will be prepared to run the gamut of a public election contest. I can't see people of the calibre of former governors-general such as Ninian Stephen or William Deane being willing to enter that fray. We rightly love our sporting heroes but I'm not sure we see that career as a suitable precursor to being our head of state. Now that so many earn so much their altruism shines a little less and maybe we have modified our affection for them.

I hope we become a republic in my lifetime. The only way to get that is to offer a model we can all endorse.

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