

Epilogue: Preparing for an influenza pandemic in Australia

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It has been enormously gratifying assembling this supplement on pandemic influenza. There are a large number of authoritative articles and supplements worldwide that provide enormously helpful information. Nevertheless, we felt that we lacked a coherent and concise package of information readily available to a broad constituency of health care providers, policymakers and the general public, dealing largely with the *Australian health management plan for pandemic influenza*.

The Australian Government, in collaboration with academic and community expertise, has invested significantly in the development, implementation and monitoring of a national plan to respond to the public health threat of pandemic influenza. This task has been enormous, embracing a “whole of government” approach with the intent of looking after the sick, containing any disease outbreaks and, critically, preserving as much as possible of services and society. State and territory health departments, local area health authorities, public and private medical services and other utilities have each been asked to commence planning and preparation for their respective jurisdictions. Inevitably, there is diversity, reflecting the levels of engagement and the types of responses that are being considered. It is worth asking: How ready is my workplace for a pandemic?; What is my role?; Have I been involved in discussions?

Judging by history, all communities will be profoundly affected by an influenza pandemic if it occurs. Furthermore, critical responses were found wanting in many countries during the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome in 2003. Therefore, we felt that there had to be effective communication of the current Australian plan, as well as brief but relevant reviews of some of the issues around influenza that underpin how the plan has evolved. Of course, many of these issues are relevant to seasonal influenza, as well as other emerging infectious diseases. For many issues, there simply are no straightforward solutions, and it is in this

context we encourage further discussion and debate to move the field forward.

There can be no doubt that the Commonwealth Government response to the threat of pandemic influenza has been remarkable. Australia is acknowledged globally for adopting an incredibly mature and proactive position and, from that political leadership, developing one of the most comprehensive and well equipped responses in the world. Most recently, the pandemic plan has been subjected to an evaluation in the form of Exercise Cumpston (named after the Commonwealth Director of Quarantine during the 1918–1919 pandemic). Over the coming weeks and months, we look forward to hearing the lessons learned from this exercise.

We commend all the authors of the articles in this supplement for embracing our vision with rigour. Each responded admirably and willingly to our request, and each complied with brutally short time frames. We acknowledge and thank the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing for their financial support and guidance in producing this supplement.

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