



The Hon Greg Hunt MP
Minister for Health and Aged Care

Ref No: MC21-035712

Mr Ken O'Dowd MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
Parliament House
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17 NOV 2021

Dear Chair 

I refer to your correspondence of 18 October 2021 concerning petition number EN3213 requesting papers describing the isolation of COVID-19.

The Australian Government is coordinating an evidence-based response to the COVID-19 pandemic, informed by the latest medical advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee and its expert standing committees, including the Public Health Laboratory Network and the Communicable Diseases Network Australia.

Multiple scientific studies across the world demonstrate that highly reputable laboratory medicine experts have isolated and sequenced the SARS-CoV-2, the virus which causes COVID-19, demonstrating that the virus exists, that it exists in variant forms, that it is different from other respiratory viruses, and that it causes a disease that has resulted in almost 5 million deaths worldwide.

Enclosed to this letter is an article by Australia's Chief Medical Officer Professor Paul Kelly, published in the Daily Telegraph on 13 August 2021 to address queries of this nature, titled: *The proof is in the facts.*

My Department is a government agency and does not conduct scientific studies in a laboratory. While my Department is not the custodian of the scientific studies concerning the isolation and establishing the existence of SARS-CoV-2, this research has informed the Government's response to the pandemic. These scientific studies can be sourced in the public domain.

In Australia, scientists at the Victorian Infectious Diseases Reference Laboratory at The Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity were the first to isolate SARS-CoV-2 outside of China, winning the 2020 MJA/MDA National Prize for Excellence in Medical Research.

This critical information was immediately shared with local and overseas reference laboratories and major North American and European virus culture collections. These peer-reviewed, evidence-based publications provide scientific evidence for the existence of this deadly virus.

For more information, you may wish to refer to the article published in The Medical Journal of Australia, which describes the first isolation of SARS-CoV-2 from a person, the sequencing of the virus and rapid sharing of the isolate:

The article, Isolation and rapid sharing of the 2019 novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) from the first patient diagnosed with COVID-19 in Australia, is available at:
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.5694/mja2.50569>.

More evidence for the isolation and existence of SARS-CoV-2, and the devastating impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic it has caused, is widely available in the public domain.

The Petitions Committee can be assured that the Government, along with the states and territories, is taking an evidence-based approach to COVID-19 and is committed to keep Australians safe.

Thank you for writing on this matter.

Yours sincerely

 Greg Hunt

Encl (1)



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The proof is in the facts

Daily Telegraph, Sydney

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The proof is in the facts

Scientific studies around the world have categorically proven the existence of Covid and its effects



PAUL KELLY

THE world has been changed by the spread of the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, the virus which causes Covid-19, since late 2019. Australia recorded its first case on January 25, 2020.

Tragically, the virus has infected more than 200 million people and has resulted in the deaths of more than 4.3 million people worldwide.

In Australia, Covid-19 had

affected 36,630 people as at August 9 and 938 people had lost their lives.

These are undeniable facts. To say otherwise is extremely damaging and undermines our efforts to respond to the pandemic.

The virus is real and its heart-breaking consequences are real. The loss of life is felt across communities, families and workplaces here in Australia and right around the world.

The continued spread of misinformation makes the job of our health professionals on the front-line harder.

From those caring for gravely ill people in intensive care units, to those conducting Covid-19 testing, tracing contacts and the thousands of Australian health care workers providing vaccinations to prevent serious illness and death.

It undermines the efforts of all



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those Australians who have acted responsibly and compassionately to protect their community when restrictions are needed to stop outbreaks.

It also devalues the lives of those who have suffered from

Covid-19, those who continue to feel its effects and every person who has died.

In 2020–21, the Department of Health received 633 requests under the Freedom of Information Act.

More than 250 were Covid-19 specific and among those were requests for ever more specific forms of 'scientific proof' of the existence of the Covid-19 virus.

I am aware that a letter advising that the department does not hold documents relevant to one of those requests is being shared on social media and used to support conspiracy theories that the virus does not exist.

The extract of that letter, shared via social media, is aimed at misleading Australians and has been, maliciously, taken out of context.

Multiple scientific studies have isolated and sequenced the virus that causes Covid-19, demonstrating that the virus exists, that it is different from the influenza virus, and that it causes a disease that has resulted in more than four million deaths worldwide in just over 18 months.

Such studies have been published in reputable medical journals around the world. It is this research which has informed the Australian Government and every health professional in our efforts to bring an end to the pandemic.

In Australia, the Victorian Infectious Diseases Reference Laboratory at the Peter Doherty Institute was the first to isolate SARS-CoV-2 outside China, winning the 2020 MJA/MDA National Prize for Excellence in Medical Research.

This critical information was immediately shared with local and overseas reference laboratories and major North American and European virus culture collections.

These peer-reviewed, evidence-based publications are where the scientific proof has been established for all to see. Despite this, the false

claims that the virus does not exist and that the pandemic is a hoax persist, circulating on social media and putting everyone's health at risk.

Social media users face a daily deluge of false Covid-19 claims and unfortunately some people share reports and documents without checking the qualifications of those making the claims or the veracity of the claims themselves.

Social media platforms are taking action to deliver on their responsibility not to provide a forum for people to spread misinformation about Covid-19. The Department of Health works to correct much of the misinformation circulating and the Covid-19 vaccines – Is It True? webpage is a great resource addressing common questions and dispelling many of the myths.

I urge all Australians to do the right thing to protect themselves and others from this deadly virus.

Maintain physical distance and good hygiene.

Stay home and get tested if you have any symptoms, follow your local advice to stay safe. Get vaccinated as soon as you are able.

Importantly, stay informed using credible sources of information, including www.health.gov.au.

Paul Kelly is Australia's chief medical officer.



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