

13 February 2023

House Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Re: Inquiry into Long COVID and Repeated COVID Infections

Dear Dr Freeland,

Thank you for the invitation to make a supplementary submission to the House Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport Inquiry into Long COVID and Repeated COVID Infections. AstraZeneca supports the Committee's progress as summarised in the Issues Paper (Dec 2022), and the continued direction and questions for investigation in the upcoming public hearings.

The Committee has requested AstraZeneca provide a supplementary submission covering the non-mortality outcomes of anti-viral medications such as (but not confined to) illness duration, medical visit presentations, productivity gains, absenteeism and any impact on long COVID or post-COVID complications.

While we know that both reinfections and long COVID place a significant burden on individuals, families, the health system, and the economy, AstraZeneca does not have any specific data available on these non-mortality outcomes of anti-viral medications.

It is for this reason that AstraZeneca recommends that the government **establish a national framework for collecting Real World Data (RWD) on long COVID** (recommendation 3 in AstraZeneca's original submission made November 2022), which would allow healthcare practitioners, policy and decision makers to better understand the epidemiology, symptoms, diagnosis, and management of long COVID.

At present, data collection in Australia is fragmented and intermittent, making data unreliable and unapplicable to the broader population. A national framework would allow clinics and hospitals to collect real time data on long COVID, helping to inform funding decisions and support the timely publication of clinical practice guidelines, including informing decisions on the role of therapies to prevent and treat COVID-19.

AstraZeneca also strongly endorses the recommendations made in the Halton Review (*Review of COVID-19 Vaccine and Treatment Purchasing and Procurement*, Sept 2022), and proposes that the Committee recommend to the Government that they proceed with the implementation of the recommendations within the stated timelines.

Specifically, health economic evaluation as part of the PBAC assessment process does not allow for the inclusion of what is referred to as 'second order costs and benefits' beyond the primary benefits of health. Benefits, such as productivity gains and reduced absenteeism, are not quantitatively considered when determining the value of the therapy for listing on the PBS.



Given the significant contribution of second order effects to the value of COVID-19 therapies, it is unclear how the government can assess the true value vaccines and therapies offer by preventing or reducing the severity of COVID-19, and thus ultimately preventing the health impacts associated with long COVID.

The Halton Review found that pre-pandemic structures and processes were not fit for purpose in an emergency context, and that ongoing, integrated advice and new advisory structures and mandates will be required for the ongoing management of COVID-19. It also found that the potential benefit of wider use of efficacious treatments should be considered, given the considerable ongoing disruption to work and education still being experienced.

Developing and implementing an Australian long COVID Integrated Health Plan

(AstraZeneca recommendation 2) would help guide priority areas for research and implementation of clinical practices, bringing together expertise and findings across the health sector, ultimately transforming Australia's approach to preventing, treating and managing long COVID.

The most effective way to prevent long COVID is to prevent infection and reinfection of COVID-19. For this reason, AstraZeneca also recommends that the Government **continue to invest in vaccination and pre-exposure prophylaxis for COVID-19** (AstraZeneca recommendation 1). It is crucial that new preventative vaccines and therapies have access to prompt funding mechanisms and distribution networks to ensure that patients have access in a timely manner – particularly those vulnerable and at risk of severe illness in rural and remote communities.

In addition to a COVID-19 funding program, we strongly support the implementation of a sustained public awareness campaign to encourage greater uptake of vaccine boosters and the availability of options for the prevention and treatment of COVID-19, consistent with the RACGP's long COVID recommendations.

This Inquiry presents an opportunity for Australia to become world leaders in the research field and importantly, enables us to understand the magnitude of long COVID, harnessing an evidence-based approach for the development of Australia's long COVID action plan. We anticipate that the resulting findings and recommendations from the Inquiry would, when implemented, significantly impact the future health and economy of Australia, and AstraZeneca is keen to continue our collaboration with the Standing Committee on the topic.

Yours sincerely,

Benjamin McDonald

Country President

AstraZeneca Australia and New Zealand

Ref: AstraZeneca Submission (247) to the HoR Committee's Inquiry into Long COVID and Repeated COVID Infections, Nov 2022