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Covid-19 (Australia) : Liberal governments' failures are the reason we are in lockdown

jeudi 1er juillet 2021, par [FIELDES Diane](#) (Date de rédaction antérieure : 29 juin 2021).

p>NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian told this morning's press conference, "What we don't want is another lockdown". Prime Minister Scott Morrison says the same thing. But the Liberals are responsible for half the country now going into one.

Berejiklian's instinct to put business interests above public health interests allowed superspreading events to occur in Sydney and allowed the virus to spread throughout the city and to other states.

Delaying the necessary lockdown means that Sydney will require a lockdown longer than what would have been the case if authorities had acted immediately in the interests of public health. And it is why Perth has also gone into another lockdown, why Melbourne has again been put on edge and why state borders are again closing.

Mary-Louise McLaws, a World Health Organization coronavirus adviser, says the NSW government's delay in locking down Sydney has "unequivocally put the entire country at risk" from the infectious Delta variant of COVID-19.

NSW Health Minister Brad Hazzard says the Delta variant of the coronavirus itself is to blame for the current crisis. "No matter what defensive steps we're taking at the moment, the virus seems to understand how to counter-attack different locations", he told reporters on the weekend.

But governments have known about the more transmissible Delta variant for most of this year and have watched as it has become one of the dominant strains worldwide. It's true that the variant has more easily exploited weaknesses in the quarantine system. But the weaknesses were exposed long ago. The "best systems" and "defensive steps" have been inadequate for more than twelve months—hence the repeated lockdowns that have been necessary across the country.

Quarantine has been breached on more than twenty previous occasions. All state governments share responsibility for this. But the federal government's failure to establish dedicated facilities is the root cause of repeated community transmission events after the virus has time and again been eradicated. The federal government's failures on this front are the reason why the Northern Territory is in lockdown and parts of Queensland are headed into lockdown again.

Morrison seems to have cottoned on, after eighteen months, that he should at least be seen to be doing something different. So [he now says](#), after agreeing to the Victorian government's proposal to build a dedicated facility in Melbourne's north, that he will allow similar facilities in Queensland and Western Australia.

But if Queensland Deputy Premier Steven Miles' account is to be believed, it sounds like the federal

government is making announcements only to save face, rather than to actually deal with the problem. “This was a one-and-a-half-page letter received by us ... just after it was provided to the *Courier Mail*”, he said of the government’s offer.

The federal government is doubly responsible for the ongoing crisis, having hopelessly bungled the vaccine rollout, which has resulted in [less than 5 percent](#) of the Australian population being fully vaccinated (the worst in the OECD).

The national cabinet [held a crisis meeting on Monday night](#) in the face of a possible national outbreak. Morrison has finally [announced](#) that aged care workers will be required to get at least one vaccine dose by mid-September. He failed to mention that the existing [vaccination scheme](#) was so hopeless that nearly 90 percent of the aged care workforce remained totally unvaccinated by the start of June.

Morrison’s vaccination and quarantine failures mean it’s not over—more lockdowns might be needed in the coming months. Catherine Bennett, the chair of epidemiology at Deakin University, warns there is [no guarantee that future outbreaks will be able to be contained](#) without them.

Astoundingly, the federal government continues to claim credit for the low number of infections and deaths in Australia relative to the rest of the world. Credit should actually go to the decision of the Andrews government in Victoria, in the face of a serious ruling class onslaught and the vocal opposition of the Liberals, to prioritise public health by locking down the state last year.

The Victorian government became the prime target for Liberals and other right-wingers whose main concern is to keep business operating as usual. Morrison relentlessly attacked Victoria’s lockdown and Queensland’s border closures in September 2020. “Lockdowns and borders” should “not feature in how Australia is dealing with COVID-19 on a sustainable basis”, he said.

But the virus was eliminated in Victoria. Grattan Institute health program director Stephen Duckett said that out of all the places that had dealt with a second wave, [Victoria deserved the gold medal](#) for bringing down case numbers. Indeed, had the Victorian government taken the advice of the Liberal Party, eastern Australia would likely resemble Britain, which has been devastated by COVID-19.

Further, the Liberal Party’s claims that it is worried about the mental health and well-being of the population is betrayed by its unwillingness to provide much support to those most affected by necessary health measures.

The NSW state government is not interested in taking care of workers in Sydney ; it is prioritising payments to businesses. The federal government will make Commonwealth disaster recovery payments available only from 1 July. For full-time workers that will be just \$500 to cover perhaps two weeks of lost wages. For those working fewer than twenty hours per week, the payment is capped at \$325. It’s nowhere near enough. And no-one in Western Australia, the Northern Territory or Queensland at this point qualifies for federal assistance.

Lockdowns are necessary to prevent mass transmission of the virus and to prevent the inevitable deaths that would result. But no-one wants them. They are debilitating for workers in particular when there is no adequate financial support to compensate for lost wages. Yet three states and a territory are now in lockdown because we have a federal Liberal government that has failed to do its job on quarantine and vaccines, and because the NSW Liberal government refused to act fast enough to prevent the spread of the virus—ironically, because of its stated commitment to avoiding lockdowns.

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P.-S.

- Red Flag. 29 June 2021 :
<https://redflag.org.au/article/liberal-governments-failures-are-reason-we-are-lockdown>