

Australia's health pass out of COVID needs to keep it simple

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Finally, there is light at the end of the COVID-19 tunnel.

We are starting to see a new narrative gaining traction that regards lockdowns as soon becoming a thing of the past and living with COVID as our realistic only option.

The final stage to a freer society and economy will require national cabinet agreement to put meat put on the bones of the National Plan to Transition Australia's National COVID-19 Response. In particular, the detail of what is required to implement the plan must be simple and straightforward and based on nationally consistent usage of the COVID Health Pass and the way rapid testing can be used to help secure freedoms.

The appeal from employers is for these last steps in our path out of COVID to be free of the often illogical, inconsistent and poorly framed patchwork of rules that have characterised too much of our approach to the pandemic so far.

Examples abound of the complexities that businesses and the community have been subjected to. You should not need to get legal advice to determine if it is safe to go to the shops.

It is of course totally within the national plan for states to do things differently at various rates of vaccination and to have their own rules. But when the agreed vaccination thresholds have been reached, we need to move to a simplified and easier to follow approach nationally.

A key to success will be adherence to a national agreement on a consistent approach to how proof of vaccination will operate.

In considering this all members of the national cabinet need to throw out the COVID play books they have used so far and approach this planning with a light touch to regulation that is realistic, consulted, well communicated, resourced, consistent and straightforward.

Importantly, "vaccine passport" terminology should not used. Calling it a passport carries the stigma of something that could encourage or facilitate closed borders which is the last thing business needs.

Our plea to the governments, as we head towards the finish line is to apply the KISS principle, what might in this case be Keep It Simple and Straightforward.

We do not need to reinvent the wheel.

Countries in Europe, for example, have rolled out easy to follow living with COVID plans.

Germany, which has 60% of its total population vaccinated (equivalent to around the 70% adult population rate we are striving for within the next couple of months) has the simple to understand *Three-G Rule: Geimpft, Genesen, Getested* - Vaccinated, Recovered, Tested. If you are vaccinated, or can show you have recovered from COVID, or you have had a negative test within three days, then you can go just about anywhere. That's it. There are some state variations to this but the Three-G-Rule is the overarching model.

The French Health Pass, its *Pass Sanitaire*, which all their people have access to, shows their vaccination or recovery status and gives them entry to public and private venues. It has in-built interoperability with the EU Digital COVID Certificate scheme for travel within the European Union, Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway, San Marino, Switzerland and the Vatican.

That is a key point – at the very least our Health Pass should give free access to the vaccinated, recovered or tested to all our states and Territories. When our vaccination levels are sufficient, we should be able to travel freely and not be left in a situation where it is easier to get from Paris to Stockholm than it is to get from Coolangatta to Tweed Heads or from Albury to Wodonga.

These rules in Europe do not amount to compulsory vaccination. People are given the choice but they do so knowing that a very large carrot exists; their freedom. As mentioned, a key to our Health Pass and the access it delivers should be rapid antigen testing for those who for whatever reason are not vaccinated.

Rapid testing supported by a Health Pass will be critical to a return to normal commercial and social exchange and will remove barriers to all forms of cooperative activity. This applies particularly to business activity where people involved in production, service provision and distribution need to come together and combine with goods and services moving along supply chains to customers whether that is in construction, logistics, manufacturing or service businesses. Questions need to be considered such as who pays for the rapid testing, particularly when it is a government requirement. Such tests should be free or it would amount to a tax on jobs. We also need to reach a point where home rapid testing is allowed as it is in many parts of the world.

The fly in the ointment in creating this national Health Pass will be any inconsistency or complexity created by our governments. They need to let go of their controls and accept a largely national approach with the national Health Pass as they agreed to in principle with the Plan in the national cabinet.

A well designed, simple and straightforward Health Pass will deliver for everyone and help us accelerate on the road to our post-COVID economic recovery.