

**Opening Statement
Dr Brendan Murphy
Senate Select Committee on COVID-19
11 March 2021**

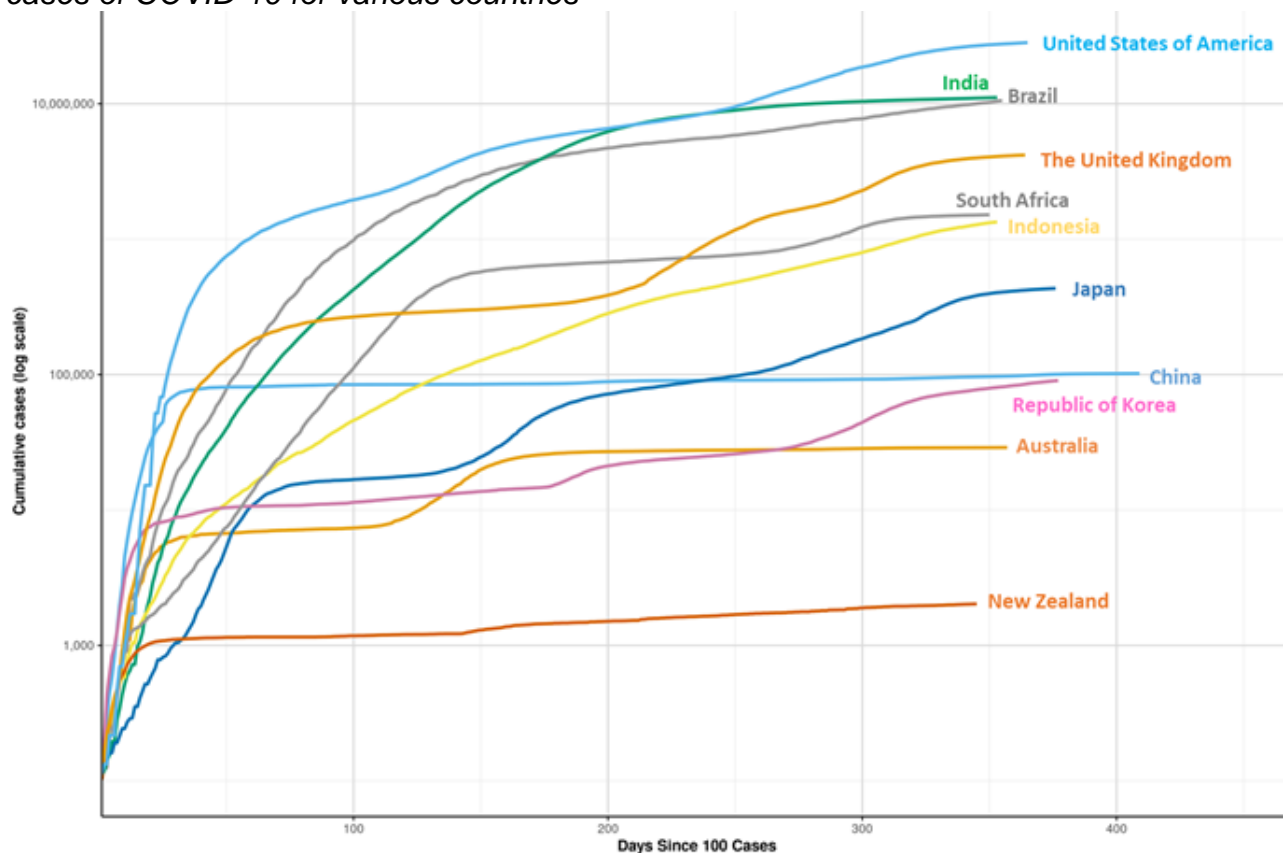
Australia is in a very fortunate position compared to so many other countries across the world. COVID-19 has had a significant impact in Australia, with **29,075 cases¹** reported since January 2020, and tragically there have been **909 deaths**.

When you compare that to the international numbers of more than **117.5 million** cases globally, including more than **2.6 million** deaths, Australia's response can only be viewed as a success.

We have also continued to suppress the virus this year, with **649 cases, of which 84 per cent have been overseas acquired**, and no deaths reported. There have been 12 consecutive days since the last locally acquired case was reported on 26 February 2021. Over the past week, there were **74 cases**, all overseas acquired.

Since **the beginning of 2021** there have been more than **34.4 million cases globally**, including **800,000 deaths**.

Figure 1: Global logarithmic epidemic curve of confirmed cases after the first 100 cases of COVID-10 for various countries



¹ Epidemiological data is current as at 12pm, Wednesday 10 March 2021

In Australia, we are fortunate to not have the “burning platform” that so many other countries have, where emergency vaccinations programs have needed to be instituted to reduce the daily ongoing death and hospitalisations. This fortunate position has informed our vaccine rollout, which is appropriate to our situation.

We were able to pursue full approval processes to have our medicines regulator, the TGA, confirm each vaccine candidate is safe and effective. The same amount of information, some tens of thousands of pages, was scrutinized for each vaccine—as we would with any other vaccine. We can now progressively scale up an orderly rollout of vaccination, with safety as the paramount objective.

We are in a position with vaccines, far better than any expert could have predicted a year ago. We have two excellent vaccines being delivered across the country. Increasingly, the real world data coming out of the UK demonstrates that both vaccines are highly effective at preventing severe COVID hospitalisations and deaths and are indistinguishable in their effectiveness, including in the elderly. There is also early evidence that the vaccines may be effective in preventing transmission.

Both these vaccines have significantly greater efficacy than the annual flu vaccines, that protect Australians every year.

Phase 1a of Australia’s COVID-19 Vaccination Program began on Monday, 22 February 2021, with those most vulnerable the first to be vaccinated.

In partnership with the states and territories, Australia has vaccinated more than **125,000 people**, including more than **30,000 people in more than 320 aged care and disability facilities**.

The first people to be receiving the vaccines are priority group 1a – which is about offering protection to those who need it the most: Australians living and working in aged care and disability care, and quarantine, border and health workers.

The rollout so far has been steady, and steadily increasing, with a clear plan for vaccinations to significantly increase from Phase 1b, when locally produced vaccine is available in large quantities.

The Commonwealth is extraordinarily grateful to our partners in the states and territories, the vaccination workforce, the logistics and data providers, the aged care operators, who have been asked to do so much, so quickly.

The Department has run processes to identify General Practices, GP Respiratory Clinics and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services willing and able to deliver COVID-19 vaccines from Phase 1b of the roll-out.

The response has been significant, including:

- more than 4,500 general practices set to participate.
- 138 GPRCs will also participate
- 108 ACCHSs working across more than 300 sites.

This, coupled with the first locally manufactured doses of AstraZeneca being available by the end of March, means we can rapidly expand and increase our rollout. Australia's local production is aiming to start with approximately 1 million doses per week, which gives us the capacity to continue to ramp up and vaccinate our population as quickly as possible. Our onshore AstraZeneca production will be crucial, at a time when many countries in the world are facing uncertainty in international supply.

Our aim is to have all adult Australians offered a vaccine by the end of October. Our rollout plan is dynamic and flexible. We will adapt to emerging scientific data, to respond to any logistic and roll out challenges, to any outbreaks that could occur and to feedback from states and territories, partners in the rollout, the medical and scientific experts and the community. Like the pandemic response itself, this is a process of continuous improvement and learning and enhancing our approach.

Safety remains our paramount concern for the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination program. In our position where we have no community transmission, we can take our rollout of the vaccines safely and carefully and scale it up according to the experience we get with the early rollout.