



CHF

Australia's
Health Panel

RESULTS

Results of Australia's Health
Panel survey on COVID Vaccine
Passports.

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Consumers Health Forum of Australia (2021)
*Results of Australia's Health Panel survey on
COVID Vaccine Passports, Canberra, Australia*

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Introduction

"I think it [a COVID Passport] would be a sensible thing to offer vaccinated people. I believe it would encourage vaccination in those people not quite sure of the safety of the vaccination."

"I find the whole discussion abhorrent. I find this frightening and worried the fact of the passport is open to so much abuse by companies and businesses. No one should know our vaccine status but me and my doctor. I am emphatically opposed to it."

As the global COVID-19 pandemic continued across the globe and COVID restrictions across the country were extended as the delta variant created new outbreaks in NSW and Victoria, additional strategies are being considered to raise vaccination levels and "beat COVID" so that Australians can return to a pre-COVID lifestyle.

One common suggestion was to further develop the MyGov COVID-19 Vaccination Certified into a 'COVID Passport' or 'COVID Vaccine Passport'. An official document that confirms COVID related information such as vaccination status and confers eligibility for a reduction in the number and scope of restrictions a person is required to follow, including for interactions between members of the community.

For the September 2021 survey of Australia's Health Panel, we want to hear what Panellists think of this idea of a COVID Passport and their views on how it could operate.

Note- for the purposes of this survey we use the term 'COVID Passport', although we acknowledge that in some contexts different name or labels will be used.

Demographics

For this survey 207 panellists participated. They were mostly female (80%), aged 46 or older (84%) and lived in major cities of more than 250,000 people (71%). Panellists came from across every state and territory. Panellists generally reported as being reasonably healthy, with only 5% reporting they were in poor health while on 21% reported they were in excellent health. Additionally, 1% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, 6% as LGBTIQ+, 8% as culturally or linguistically diverse and 18% as a person with a disability.

COVID Passport Attitudes

Panellists were largely in favour of a COVID Passport being introduced- with 72% supporting it, 12% opposing and 15% being unsure. However, those who were not in support of a COVID passport generally cited a common reason for their opposition or uncertainty- the principle that such a document would be breaching their privacy by disclosing personal health information they believed should be known only to them and their doctor.

If a COVID Passport was introduced, panellists were overwhelming in favour of it in including a person's COVID vaccine 2nd dose status (86%) and any COVID vaccine medical exemptions (78%). Panellists were mixed as to whether a photo (62%), COVID vaccination 1st dose (61%) or recent COVID test results (53%).

Panellists were not supportive of COVID Passports containing other personal information like date of birth or address (37%) or other vaccinations status e.g. influenza (28%). When asked what information explicitly *shouldn't* be on a COVID Passport, significant proportions of panellists selected other personal information (40%) and other vaccination status (48%) as information that specifically should be excluded.

This indicates that the Australian populace would generally be supportive of having a COVID Passport system established, but that it would need to be opt-in and contain only the most critical COVID specific information e.g. fully vaccinated status and/or medical exemptions.

"Minimise the information it shows, e.g. just show eligibility for whatever the State restrictions are... Some form of security so that validity can be confirmed."

"COVID passports are abhorrent, immoral and an offence against humanity."

COVID Passport Logistics

Regarding what format COVID Passports should be made available in, no suggested format was a clear favourite. Every option received support from between one third and two thirds of Panellists, except for a physical booklet like what is used to manage childhood vaccines (7%). See Table 2 for the full breakdown.

As to what formats they personally would primarily use, the clear preference was for it to be on people’s phones in the same app that they use to ‘check in’ as part of COVID requirements (35%). The next most popular was ‘a physical card that fits in a wallet/purse’ (18%) and rounding out the top 3 was ‘on my phone in my digital wallet’. Interestingly there was relatively little interest for a new dedicated app to be created to manage a COVID Passport (12%).

Table 1- Panellist views and personal preference on potential formats for COVID Passport

Potential COVID Passport format	Want as an option	Personal preference for primary use
A physical card that fits in my wallet/purse	60%	18%
On my phone in the same app I use to ‘Check In’ to locations as part of COVID requirements	53%	35%
The same format as the current COVID Certificate i.e. in My Health Record or via the Immunisation Register	43%	10%
On my phone in a dedicated app	36%	12%
On my phone in my digital wallet e.g. Apple Wallet, Google Pay	34%	15%
Other (please specify)	13%	2%
A physical booklet like the Immunisation Book for managing childhood vaccines (sometimes called the “Maternal Child and Welfare Nurse Health Book” or “Blue Book”)	7%	2%
None, I would not use it	N/A	6%

In the free text ‘Other’ fields, Panellists did not suggest specific additional alternate formats but highlighted some characterises of formats they thought would be essential:

- The ability for the COVID passport to not be fakeable, falsifiable or in some way easy to modify.
- A flexible format that is both digital and on-digital to allow for people in different situations to be able to use their COVID passport.
- No format at all i.e. not having or needing to use a COVID passport.

“A combination of convenient “hardcopy” and digital storage will be ideal as this gives people different options to use whatever suits them”

Panellists overwhelming believed that a COVID Passport should be administered at a Federal level (71%), with only a minority thinking it should be done at a State/Territory level (19%). The

remaining 10% who selected 'Other' did not nominate any alternative administration levels, such as locally or internationally, rather noting that either:

- They did not think there should be a COVID passport
- Normally they would want it administered Federally but that given the track record of the current Federal Government they do not believe it would be done successfully if administered by them.

Aligning with that second point, Panellists were generally concerned about COVID passports being falsified or being held up with administrative errors or delays- with only 11% of Panellists expressing that they were not concerned about either of these things. See Table 2.

Table 2- Level of concern amongst Panellists about COVID Passport logistic issues

	Very concerned	Concerned	Somewhat concerned	Not concerned at all
How concerned are you about the possibility of fraud via people falsifying COVID passports?	28%	31%	31%	11%
How concerned are you about the possibility of administrative error or delays – e.g. vaccines not being updated in immunisation register or reflected in the COVID passport?	26%	30%	32%	11%

This indicates that the Australian populace who want a COVID passport want a system that is flexible in format, integrated with other COVID systems such as 'check in' apps while maintaining security/reliability and is administered, competently, as a single system Australia wide.

I expect many and big hiccups with the government's implementation and use of the passport. From the money that would be wasted on the wrong technology and methods. I am convinced that the government will constantly try to include in the passport more information than necessary, share information between agencies.

There will be data mistakes and I expect the agency in charge to be very slow to correct them. I am concern about the well-being of the people who will have to deal with such a level of frustration and bureaucracy.

COVID Passport Effects

In regards to what COVID Passports could enable, majorities of panellists supported them enabling international travel and return to Australia (67%), being able to freely conduct normal activities in one's local area e.g. go to the gym or eat at a restaurant (64%) and be exempt from quarantine requirements when crossing State borders within Australia (57%).

Panellists did not support COVID passports permitting exemption from stay at home/lockdown requirements (39%), being able to not wear a facemask within outside their home (17%) or a general exemption from all COVID restrictions (23%). Additionally, Panellists were split (46%) as to whether COVID passports should enable them to attend activities with large numbers of people e.g. live sport, music concerts. See Table 3 for the full breakdown.

Table 3- Panellist views on potential benefits conferred by a COVID Passport

Potential COVID benefit Passport	Level of support
To be able to travel internationally and easily return to Australia	67%
To be able to freely conduct normal activities in my local area e.g. go to the gym, eat a meal in a restaurant, play social sport, go to the cinema etc	64%
Be exempt from quarantine requirements when crossing state borders	57%
To be able to freely attend events/activities with large numbers of people e.g. watch live sport events, attend a music performance	46%
Be exempt from stay at home/lockdown restrictions	39%
Be exempt from all COVID related restrictions	23%
Be allowed to not wear a face mask when outside my home	17%
Other (please specify)	15%

This indicates that the overwhelming desire from the community is to be able to return to the normally of life pre-COVID and be able to reunite with family and loved ones, which were the predominate themes provided in the open text responses. However equally people are aware that vaccines won't be a silver bullet that allows us to overcome COVID, meaning that other measures will still need to be implemented and followed.

The passport is not a standalone solution to the current issue of the economic and social downside of lockdowns and restrictions. We'll need well-funded and resourced tracking and testing for a long time into the future and the current focus and debate on passports is unhelpful in helping the public to grasp what's ahead. It may foster unrealistic expectations about what the COVID normal future can be.

COVID Passport Implementation

Panellists were overwhelmingly in support of private business being able to deny non-essential services to people who don't have a COVID passport that confirms their vaccination and/or non-infectious status- with 71% of panellists supporting that. Panellists were comparatively split as to whether Government/Public agencies could similarly do the same- with 55% of panellists supporting them also being able to deny non-essential services to those without COVID Passports. See Table 4.

Interestingly Panellists were less certain as to whether COVID Passports would help us to 'beat COVID', with only 40% thinking they would. A further 35% thought they maybe would help, 8% were unsure if they would help and the remaining 18% didn't think they would help. However, Panellists were generally supportive of the government using privileges linked to COVID Passports to drive up vaccine uptake (59%).

Table 4- Panellist views on what COVID Passports should and shouldn't be used for

	Yes	Maybe	No	Unsure
If there was a COVID Passport system implemented, do you believe that private businesses should be able to deny non-essential services to a person who does not have a COVID Passport that confirms full vaccination status and/or non-infection status?	71%	14%	12%	3%
If there was a COVID Passport system implemented, do you believe that Government/Public Agencies should be able to deny non-essential access to services or facilities to a person who does not have a COVID Passport that confirms full vaccination status and/or non-infection status?	55%	18%	21%	6%
Do you believe that introducing COVID passports would help us beat COVID?	40%	35%	18%	8%
Should the government use COVID passports and privileges to drive up vaccine uptake?	59%	19%	18%	5%

Panellists were overwhelmingly in favour of getting a COVID passport personally if one was introduced, with 81% reporting that they would get one.

They did however have some concerns that introducing a COVID passport could cause some groups in Australia to be disadvantaged. Generally due to a fear that these groups would be excluded or be denied services due to not having a COVID Passport *despite their non-vaccination being out of their control*.

Prime amongst such groups were those who are unable to get vaccinated due to medical concerns e.g. those allergic to vaccine components. Next most common were those who are part of historically or currently marginalised communities such as First Nations Peoples, CALD communities or migrants and had reasons to be distrustful of Government led programs. Third were those groups who simply had not yet had the opportunity to access the vaccine- whether it was due to a supply issue in their area, a low number of health professionals administering in their area or simply due to them being a low priority group who hadn't had sufficient time pass to get their second dose. Finally were those whose personal circumstance (such as homelessness)

or characteristics (such as low digital literacy) could prevent them from fully utilising a COVID passport.

Distinct from this was a noted lack of concern or sympathy for groups who might experience exclusion or service denial if a COVID Passport was introduced *due to their active personal choices*. While some panellists expressed disdain for anyone who held such “anti-vax” views, other panellists noted that it was well within their rights to make such choice for themselves but that choices had consequences- which in this case could justly include being denied liberties others.

This indicates that the Australian populace largely desire a COVID Passport to be implemented as tool that reliably and quickly confirms vaccination status (or medical exemption) that lets people “get on with their day-to-day lives”, however they recognise that vaccination (and thus a COVID Passport) is not enough by itself to overcome COVID so other restrictions will still be needed e.g. wearing of facemasks, stay-at-home-orders. They also support businesses denying services to people who do not use a COVID Passport to demonstrate vaccination/immunity status.

However, they recognise that the implementation of any such COVID Passport needs to be done in an equitable manner where those who have valid reasons to be sceptical of Government programs or who have not been able to get fully vaccinated due to external factors e.g. local supply issues are not unfairly penalised.

“I would be concerned about vulnerable populations generally e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, remote areas, the elderly, people of non-English speaking background, people with a disability particularly intellectually disabled. Many people do not have a smartphone or internet access so hard to keep their information up to date. They also may be more vulnerable to policing and over-policing and therefore not trust such a tool and its consequences.”

COVID Vaccine Views

Participating panellists were highly vaccinated, above the national average, with 81% being fully vaccinated ('double dosed') and an additional 7% having received their first dose.

Panellists also generally thought that COVID vaccination should be mandatory- with only 14% saying they shouldn't be mandatory for anybody. However, Panellists were split as to *who* they should be mandatory for. 45% believed they should be mandatory for everybody, 42% for all "essential workers" including healthcare workers and teachers and 37% for all customer facing roles. See Table 5 for the full breakdown.

Table 5- Panellist views on if COVID vaccines should be mandatory

Do you believe that the COVID vaccine should be mandatory for...	% selected
For all "essential workers" including health care workers and teachers	45%
For everyone	42%
For all customer facing workers	37%
For people in additional roles/circumstances (please specify)	17%
For no-one	14%

17% of panellists also identified other roles that they should have mandatory which included:

- People whose work involved them travelling a lot, such as transport workers, taxi drivers and delivery drivers
- People who work with travelers such as at airports, airlines or hotels
- People who work with the elderly (such as aged care), people with disabilities or people who are immunocompromised
- People who work in enforcement areas, such as police, prison workers and maritime border control.

Regarding *why* they believed vaccinations should be mandatory for those groups; the uniform theme of responses was that people in those roles had a duty to society, those they worked with or around, to ensure that they were immune from COVID and would not transmit it to others.

Regarding why they believed vaccines *shouldn't* be mandatory for everyone, common reasons included:

- "Medical concerns"- Not everyone can get the vaccine due to medical concerns
- "Risk analysis"- it only seemed reasonable to require vaccines in those who are most at risk of catching and spreading it
- "Right to choose"- It is ethically dubious to force someone to undergo any kind of medical procedure against their will
- "Logistics"- It is potentially impractical to ensure and enforce that everyone does get vaccinated

This suggests there is a view in the Australian populace that while it is important to respect bodily autonomy and individual choice (while also directing resources pragmatically for something as large scale as a national COVID response), there is a duty to protect others a part of the 'social contract' which overrides that individual autonomy when the risk to others is sufficiently high, such as a global pandemic.

"I completely appreciate that everyone has the right to choose but choices have consequences. I think it is disgraceful to selfishly put others and our healthcare professionals at risk."

Conclusion

In summary, this Australia's Health Panel survey found that Australians are generally quite supportive of a COVID Vaccine Passport and COVID vaccinations more broadly as part of protecting public health. However, there is a reasonably sized minority of people who prioritise personal choice and autonomy.

Overall, the community would support a COVID passport being introduced but want it to only contain the minimal amount of essential COVID specific information ('double dose' status and/or medical exemptions), be format flexible but tie in with exiting 'check in' apps, be administered as an Australian wide system and be *optional*.

They generally support private business denying non-essential services to any individuals who do not demonstrate vaccination status and/or medical immunities but are unsure about Government/Public agencies doing the same.

Finally, they believe that particular attention would need to be paid to make sure groups who are historically marginalised or have been currently as part of prior COVID actions, are not further marginalised by an uneven and ill-thought roll out of a COVID passport system.

"People need to be reminded that until sometime in the 1980s we couldn't travel overseas & re-enter Australia without appropriate vaccinations. What we now call a 'vaccination passport' is nothing new. There also needs to be arrangements for the small number of people with genuine verified medical reasons for not being vaccinated."

The Consumers Health Forum of Australia would like to thank all panellists for giving up their time to participate in this survey.

Any questions about this survey and its findings can be directed to info@chf.org.au.