

ANNUAL REPORT 2024



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Introduction

The [Collaboration on Social Science and Immunisation \(COSSI\)](#) is a collective of researchers, healthcare professionals, people working in immunisation policy and practice, and consumer representatives who work collaboratively to improve vaccine acceptance and uptake.

COSSI was established by the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance (NCIRS) and the University of Sydney in 2016.

What does COSSI do?

The aim of COSSI is to better inform Australian immunisation policy and practice with high-quality evidence from the social sciences.

The objectives of the network are to:

- facilitate communication and collaboration between those working in the field
- share research and findings
- build capacity in research, evaluation and translation.
- advocate for the inclusion of social science into vaccine decision-making

COSSI activities include regular knowledge exchange meetings, seminars/webinars, and occasional in-person meetings and workshops. Members can also communicate with each other via the COSSI email list, which currently has 316 members.

COSSI Governance Committee members as at December 2024

Katie Attwell (Chair, January–June 2024)

Jess Kaufman (Deputy Chair, January–June 2024)

Catherine King (Co-Chair, July 2024–present)

Holly Seale (Co-Chair, July 2024–present)

Carla Puca (Student representative)

Nicole Batten (Student representative)

Aleena Williams

Amalie Dyda

Caitlin Kent

Ikram Abdi

Jane Williams

Josette Chor

Julie Leask

Kasia Bolsewicz

Kerrie Wiley

Laura Ferris

Margie Danchin

Maryke Steffens

Paola Garcia

Patrick Cashman

Samantha Carlson

NCIRS Secretariat support

Corina Shiels

Justin Boxall

Kathleen Prokopovich

Activities

COSSI workshop: Using technology in vaccine social science: obstacles and opportunities

As part of our annual activities, we hosted a half-day COSSI workshop which explored the intersection of technology and vaccine social science (10/06/2024) coinciding with the Public Health Association of Australia's Communicable Disease and Immunisation Conference in Queensland. The event featured three speakers:

- **Associate Professor Tom Aechtner** (University of Queensland), who discussed the role of artificial intelligence in research and combating misinformation.
- **Dr Amalie Dyda** (University of Queensland), who presented her research comparing the spread of vaccine misinformation across traditional search engines and emerging large language models like ChatGPT.
- **Dr Gerardo Luis Dimaguila** (Murdoch Children's Research Institute), who introduced *VaxPulse*, an innovative machine learning tool designed to analyse and respond to vaccine misinformation online.

Following a Q&A with the speakers, the approximately 30 workshop participants engaged in an interactive game of '*Spot the Fake News Headline*' before hearing from the outgoing COSSI Deputy Chair **Dr Jess Kaufman**, who shared insights into *Cranky Uncle Arabic*, a digital game designed to teach vaccine misinformation resistance skills to Arabic-speaking communities.

The workshop concluded with **Associate Professor Holly Seale**, former COSSI Deputy Chair and incoming COSSI Co-Chair, sharing her experiences with digital tools and apps, including the multilingual *Vaccine Dictionary*, which supports vaccine acceptance across diverse communities.

The day wrapped up with a social networking session, in which attendees reconnected with colleagues, made new connections and set the tone for the upcoming Communicable Diseases and Immunisation Conference (CDIC) event.

An important outcome of this workshop was that COSSI gained several new members, including individuals who volunteered to join the steering committee. It was particularly valuable to increase engagement from Queensland, where COSSI membership was previously relatively limited.

COSSI CDC Working Group

The Australian Government's COVID-19 Response Inquiry called for the new Australian Centres for Disease Control (CDC) to include in-house social science capability and greater prominence of social science expertise in future pandemic advisory roles. The COSSI CDC Working Group convened to generate evidence-based recommendations on the best practice for including social science in the structure and function of the new Australian CDC.

The Working Group explored how countries with comparable health systems use social sciences in public health decision-making through synthesising data from: (i) a desk review of public health agencies in 37 OECD countries and (ii) a qualitative key informant study of 11 government professionals and academics from 10 countries who had insight into the use of social science in public health decision-making.

From this synthesis, the Working Group identified three different structural models used by global public health agencies to include public health in decision-making: 'Embedded', 'Hub and spoke', and 'Hybrid'. Each model is based on the relative proportions of social science expertise and activity conducted 'in-house' or leveraged through external organisations such as universities.

Three important pillars of consideration for embedding social science into a newly established Australian CDC were also identified: 'People', 'Systems' and 'Funding'.

Based on these findings, the Working Group made four recommendations in regards to the new Australian Centre for Disease Control:

1. **Employ a hybrid organisational model.** Embed social sciences expertise and data by leveraging existing expertise in external institutions across Australia. Maintain internal core functions to collate and synthesise social sciences data with other forms of data and translate for decision-makers.
2. **Embed social science expertise** from a variety of disciplines at all levels of the data-to-decision-making process, alongside traditional biomedical expertise.
3. **Establish processes for data generation and sharing** between external expert organisations and internal core functional units. Sustain workforce and systems to meet data needs in routine and emergency settings.
4. **Formalise funding pathways and establish agreements** between external expert nodes and the Australian CDC. This will ensure sufficient capacity to collect and analyse social science data to formulate advice during both routine and crisis response.

The findings and recommendations were shared through a variety of avenues throughout the project, including national conference presentations, meetings with the CDC establishment branch, and periodic updates for government, health and research stakeholders as the study progressed.

COSSI CDC Working Group members were Dr Kerrie Wiley (University of Sydney); Associate Professor Katie Attwell (University of Western Australia); Professor Margie Danchin (Murdoch Children's Research Institute & University of Melbourne); Dr Catherine King (University of Sydney); Associate Professor Jane Frawley (University of Technology, Sydney); Ms Nicole Batten (University of Sydney); Ms Emma Campbell (University of Sydney).

The study was undertaken at the Sydney School of Public Health, University of Sydney, and funded by Dr Wiley's NHMRC Investigator Grant (GNT2008650). Key informant interviews were approved by the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (project 2022/837).

COSSI Knowledge Exchange Meetings (online)

Meeting	Date
<p>'Tips for consulting with non-governmental organisations, government departments/agencies' [Internal meeting]</p> <p><i>Presenters:</i> Associate Professor Holly Seale (University of New South Wales), Dr Kerrie Wiley (University of Sydney) and Associate Professor Katie Attwell (University of Western Australia)</p>	25 March 2024
<p>'Myth-busting or meaning-making? Public science communications and the infodemic'</p> <p><i>Presenter:</i> Professor Maya J Goldenberg (University of Guelph, Canada)</p>	3 June 2024
<p>'Results from the National Vaccination Insights Project'</p> <p><i>Presenters:</i> Dr Maryke Steffens, Dr Katarzyna Bolsewicz (NCIRS), Dr Jessica Kaufman (Murdoch Children's Research Institute), Dr Maria-Christou-Ergos and Dr Majdi Sabahelzain (University of Sydney)</p>	26 August 2024

Selected policy engagement

COSSI CDC Working Group study:

- Interim study findings presented at Global Health Security Conference, Sydney Convention Centre, June 2024
- Interim study findings presented at Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) National Communicable Diseases and Immunisation conference, Brisbane Convention Centre, Brisbane, June 2024
- Email correspondence sharing interim study findings to a wide group of stakeholders, including members of the CDC Establishment Branch and PHAA on the 30 July 2024
- Content-complete report shared with wide group of stakeholders, including members of the CDC Establishment Branch and PHAA on 19 December 2024

Online engagement

- *COSSI LinkedIn:*
 - 88 followers
 - www.linkedin.com/company/collaboration-on-social-science-and-immunisation
- *COSSI website:*
 - 2,150 page views (Jan – Dec 2024)
- *COSSI Student and Early Career Researchers Network (established December 2022):*
 - all new members are offered the opportunity to self-identify as a student or early career researcher and invited to join
 - 30 students and early career researchers have joined
 - www.facebook.com/groups/cossisercn

How to join COSSI

Anyone with an interest in social science and immunisation can join COSSI. Many of our members are health professionals who deliver and communicate about immunisation regularly. Some members work in public health policy or in government. Others are academic researchers, lecturers or students interested in different aspects of social science and immunisation. Some members represent consumers.

Join COSSI: www.ncirs.org.au/cossi/join-cossi

Contact COSSI: cossi.aus@gmail.com