COSSI

Collaboration on
Social Science
and Immunisation

ANNUAL REPORT 2025–2026



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Introduction

The Collaboration on Social Science and Immunisation (COSSI) is a network 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 in 2016 by the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance (NCIRS) and the University of Sydney (USyd).

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.

COSSI Governance Committee members

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

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

Aleena Williams

Amalie Dyda

Caitlin Kent

Ikram Abdi

Jane Williams (resigned committee July 2026)

Jessica Kaufman

Josette Chor

Julie Leask (resigned committee June 2025 after continuous service since 2016)

Katie Attwell

Kate Lloyd

Kasia Bolsewicz

Kerrie Wiley (resigned committee January 2026 after continuous service since 2016)

Laura Ferris

Margie Danchin (resigned committee September 2026)

Maryke Steffens

Nicole Batten

Paola Garcia

Patrick Cashman

NCIRS Secretariat support

Corina Shiels

Bianca Bullivant

Kathleen Prokopovich

Laila Wasid

Activities

Public Health Association of Australia Communicable Diseases and Immunisation Conference 2026

COSSI Symposium

To celebrate COSSI's 10th anniversary, COSSI hosted a symposium at the 2026 Public Health Association of Australia Communicable Diseases and Immunisation Conference. The session, chaired by Professor Holly Seale, explored the critical role of behavioural and social science in strengthening immunisation programs.

The symposium featured presentations from Lisa Menning (World Health Organization), who provided an international perspective on developments in immunisation social science, and Professor Julie Leask (University of Sydney), COSSI's founding Chair, who reflected on the evolution of the field in Australia. They were joined for a panel discussion by Professor Allen Cheng (Monash Health and Monash University), Professor Katie Flanagan (Westmead Hospital and the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation), Professor Kristine Macartney (NCIRS) and Dr Stephanie Williams (Australian Centre for Disease Control).

Key themes included the need to move beyond a narrow focus on vaccine hesitancy and recognise the wider behavioural, social and structural drivers of vaccination, including trust, social norms, access, affordability, convenience and service quality.

Speakers highlighted the value of routinely collecting behavioural and social data to inform locally appropriate interventions, rather than relying on one-off studies or evidence generated in substantially different settings. The discussion also considered declining institutional trust, increasingly fragmented information environments, misinformation and the emergence of generative artificial intelligence.

A central conclusion was that behavioural and social science should be embedded as a core component of immunisation policy, program design and evaluation, supported by sustained expertise, partnerships and funding





COSSI CDC Working Group Report

The Australian Government's COVID-19 Response Inquiry called for the new Australian Centre 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 COSSI CDC Working Group published the report *Embedding social science into public health and disease control: Informing best practice for the Australian Centre for Disease Control*. The report examined how behavioural, social and communication sciences could be incorporated into the structure and decision-making processes of the Australian CDC. It drew on a review of public health agencies across 37 OECD countries and interviews with 11 government and academic experts from 10 countries.

The report identified 3 models for incorporating social science into public health agencies:

- an embedded model, in which expertise is located within the agency
- a hub-and-spoke model, which draws primarily on external expertise
- a hybrid model combining internal capability with external research networks.



The hybrid model was considered most appropriate for Australia.

Three foundations for effective implementation were identified: people, systems and funding. The report emphasised the need for multidisciplinary expertise, including people capable of translating evidence into practical policy advice; formal processes for generating, sharing and integrating social science data; and secure, sustained funding for routine and emergency response capacity.



It recommended embedding social science throughout the data-to-decision process, establishing formal partnerships between the Australian CDC and external expert organisations and ensuring that social science expertise contributes alongside biomedical and epidemiological evidence. These arrangements would help the Australian CDC better understand community needs, design effective interventions and support evidence-informed public health decisions during both routine operations and future health emergencies.

COSSI CDC Working Group members were Dr Kerrie Wiley (University of Sydney); 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).

Report citation: Campbell E, Batten N, King C, Frawley J, Attwell K, Danchin M, Wiley K, for the Collaboration on Social Science in Immunisation. Embedding social science into public health and disease control: Informing best practice for the Australian Centre for Disease Control. December 2024.

Full report available at: https://ncirs.org.au/cossi/cossi-reports-and-publications.

COSSI research updates

A new initiative was established in 2026 to showcase recent research articles relevant to social science and immunisation. COSSI members receive an email featuring a selected article, with an informative overview and discussion of its relevance to social science immunisation from the author. This email also includes a list of recent publications in the field.

The initiative functions as a current awareness service, curating key research articles within the COSSI's scope. Members are also encouraged to post their recent publications and can nominate to have their article showcased in this regular update.

COSSI Knowledge Exchange Meetings (online)

Meeting	Date
Beyond biomedicine – examining Australia's diphtheria outbreak with a social science lens Speakers: • **Dr Lorraine Anderson** – a proud Palawa woman and Medical Director, Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services, Broome • **Dr Bhavi Ravindran** – Head of Surveillance and Response, Northern Territory Centre for Disease Control • **Dr Stephanie Enkel** – Postdoctoral Researcher, The Kids Research Institute Australia This meeting explored the complex factors shaping Australia's diphtheria outbreak and its response. Drawing on research and experience from remote communities, speakers examined the epidemiological, social, cultural, historical and structural factors influencing disease transmission and health outcomes. The session brought together expertise from clinical practice, public health and social science research, highlighting how interdisciplinary approaches could strengthen outbreak preparedness and support more effective and equitable responses to infectious disease outbreaks.	27 July 2026

Barriers to vaccination in adults & children: 2025 insights and solutions Speakers: • **Dr Maryke Steffens**, NCIRS • **Dr Jess Kaufman**, MCRI • **Dr Kasia Bolsewicz**, NCIRS • **Dr Majdi Sabahelzein**, USyd This session explored why some adults and children missed recommended vaccines. Drawing on recent Australian research conducted through the National Vaccination Insights project, the session examined current barriers to childhood age-based and influenza vaccination, trends in the drivers of adult influenza vaccination over a three-year period, and practical, evidence-based strategies to improve uptake. Presenters from the project team, a collaboration between the Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI), NCIRS and the University of Sydney, reflected on lessons learned across multiple study waves and shared insights for researchers, policymakers and immunisation professionals.	4 May 2026
Updates on state immunisation programs Speakers: • **Dr Sonya Ennis**, Health Protection New South Wales: New South Wales Immunisation Strategy • **Mareeka Hair**, Health Protection New South Wales: Priority Populations Immunisation Program • **Kaylene Lottkowitz and Associate Professor Nicolas Smoll**, Sunshine Coast Public Health Unit: VIBE Research Project The meeting provided members with the opportunity to hear about recent updates that had been made to vaccine programs in NSW and Queensland and to reflect on issues currently impacting on uptake.	25 August 2025
Deliberation on childhood vaccination in Canada: public input on ethical trade-offs in vaccination policy Speaker: **Professor Kieran C. O'Doherty**, University of Guelph (Canada) COSSI members had the opportunity to hear from an international guest, Professor O'Doherty, who focused his presentation on how public health and ethical considerations could inform childhood vaccination policy.	24 February 2025

Professor O'Doherty presented the design, implementation and findings of a four-day public forum in Ontario, Canada, in which 25 participants collectively developed 20 policy recommendations. The forum considered vaccination requirements and exemptions, vaccine communication, and the reporting and compensation of adverse events following immunisation.	

Selected policy engagement

NHMRC workshop on pandemic research preparedness

Professor Holly Seale represented COSSI at the NHMRC Strategic Workshop on Research Preparedness for the Next Pandemic, held on 17 February 2026 with support from the Australian CDC. The workshop brought together approximately 100 representatives from government, research, clinical practice, industry and the community to consider how Australia could strengthen research preparedness for future pandemics.

A key outcome was recognition that pandemic research preparedness should be treated as an enduring national capability, supported between emergencies through sustained funding, clear governance, standing research platforms, established ethics and data-sharing arrangements, and workforce development. Social, behavioural and communication research was identified as a core component of this capability rather than an optional addition to biomedical and epidemiological research.

Participants highlighted the need for continuous monitoring of community attitudes, trust, risk perceptions, vaccine access and uptake, as these change throughout a pandemic. Vaccine hesitancy, misinformation, fatigue and declining trust were considered predictable and researchable issues that should be anticipated in preparedness planning.

However, discussions also cautioned against treating low uptake solely as a communication problem. Research should examine practical and structural barriers, including transport, time away from work, appointment systems and previous experiences with institutions and inform corresponding improvements to service design.

Two-way community engagement was viewed as essential to research legitimacy and the effectiveness of public health responses. Relationships with communities and trusted messengers needed to be developed and maintained between crises, with dedicated resourcing and clear accountability. Particular emphasis was placed on First Nations leadership and culturally appropriate, locally led engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Full report available at: https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/nhmrc-strategic-workshop-report-research-preparedness-next-pandemic.

National Immunisation Strategy Implementation Workshops

Both COSSI co-chairs, Professor Holly Seale and Dr Catherine King represented COSSI at separate workshops conducted in September 2025 as part of consultation on the implementation of the National Immunisation Strategy. The workshops, facilitated by NCIRS, aimed to gather information on new or existing activities that could address the National Immunisation Strategy goals for 2025-2030. Participants were also asked to discuss barriers and facilitators to implementation of these activities. Many COSSI members were also afforded the opportunity to complete a survey on this topic distributed in the same month.

COSSI engagement

- COSSI members: 356
- COSSI webpage views: 1,326 (January 2025–July 2026)

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