AUSTRALASIAN INSTITUTE OF DIGITAL HEALTH

Australian Centre for Disease Control (CDC) Bill and a related bill

Submission by the Australasian Institute of Digital Health (AIDH) September 2025

Via consultation webpage at https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/DiseaseControlBill2025

Anja Nikolic, CEO
Australasian Institute of Digital Health (AIDH)
Level 1, 85 Buckhurst Street
South Melbourne VIC 3205
+61(3) 9326 3311, policy@digitalhealth.org.au
ABN 80 097 598 742

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Introduction

The Australasian Institute of Digital Health (AIDH) welcomes the opportunity to input into the Community Affairs Legislation Committee inquiry into Australian Centre for Disease Control Bill 2025 and a related bill.

AIDH supports the passage of both:

- Australian Centre for Disease Control Bill 2025.
- Australian Centre for Disease Control (Consequential Amendments and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2025.

Background

Australia is the only Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) country that does not have an established and recognised authority for the national scientific leadership and coordination of communicable diseases.

This gap in our health prevention and pandemic preparedness was identified in March 2013by the Parliament of Australian when the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing inquiry *Diseases have no borders: Report on the inquiry into health issues across international borders* was released.[1]

The Standing Committee recommended that:

> The Australian Government, in consultation with state and territory governments, commission an independent review to assess the case for establishing a national centre for communicable disease control in Australia.

The call for an Australian Centre for Disease Control (CDC) has been widely supported by the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) and leading medical associations.

[1] https://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/house_of_representatives_committees?url=haa/internationalhealthissues/report.htm#chapters

The Australian Medical Association AMA issued a Position Statement[2] in 2017 calling for "the immediate establishment of an Australian National Centre for Disease Control (CDC), with a national focus on current and emerging communicable disease threats, engaging in global health surveillance, health security, epidemiology and research."

As the AMA stressed, communicable diseases do not recognise national borders. Written two years before the Covid-19 pandemic, the AMA pointed out in their Position Statement – with accurate foresight – that Australia's "current approach to disease threats, and control of infectious diseases, relies on disjointed State and Commonwealth formal structures, informal networks, collaborations, and the goodwill of public health and infectious disease physicians."

Australia's response to Covid-19 has been well-documented, including the different state and territory measures and responses, and problems with health data collection and use, which reinforces the need to establish a CDC.

AIDH support for CDC Bill

The Australasian Institute of Digital Health (AIDH) has welcomed the progress towards a CDC. In October 2020, the Australian Labor Party committed to establishing a CDC, and in early 2023, the Labor government established an interim CDC. The legislation before Parliament will see this commitment delivered.

We are particularly supportive of aspects of the Bill that promote digital health data to protect the public, as noted in the Explanatory Memorandum[3]:

> The Australian CDC would be a data-driven organisation, delivering a contemporary, nationally coordinated approach to public health data to enable more accurate and faster detection of risks, more consistent responses across borders and a strong foundation for national public health planning.

In January 2024, AIDH made a submission to the Australian Centre for Disease Control (CDC) consultation on how the Australian CDC plans to use data.[4]

Along with our support for the Australian CDC, we note that the Covid-19 pandemic revealed problems in effective collation and sharing of health data that is critical in preventing, managing and controlling communicable diseases.

AIDH maintains that an Australian Centre for Disease Control is in our national interest, and is vital and essential in protecting Australian citizens and residents.

Recent changes to health policies in the United States, including changes to policies on vaccinations, reduction in research grants and upheaval at the US Centre for Disease Control and

[2] https://www.ama.com.au/sites/default/files/documents/Australian_National_Centre_for_Disease_Control_2017_AMA_Postion_Statement.pdf
[3] https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22legislation%2Fems%2Fr7369_ems_5b73d5c4-a691-4c2a-886f-04dcf6a2a7c3%22
[4] https://digitalhealth.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/FINAL_AIDH_sub_Australian-CDC_Use_of_data_Sept24.pdf

Prevention, reinforces the critical need for an independent, trusted and transparent Australian CDC dedicated to surveillance, scientific research and leadership in providing advice to governments on responding to infectious diseases and other threats.

AIDH reiterates that access to, and the appropriate use of, digital health data is vital for public safety and emergency health management. An Australian CDC is the most appropriate entity to manage and coordinate public health emergencies that require partnerships across the states and territories, and international sharing of information to protect the public.

AIDH has, in our previous submission and media comment, supported the role of CDC in accessing appropriate deidentified data on communicable and other diseases, along with data related to the impact of environmental factors and climate change on human health. We recognise that accessing this data will be vitally important to CDC fulfilling its defined role and functions of monitoring communicable diseases and providing expert, informed advice to governments.

There is abundant medical and scientific expertise predicting the likelihood of future pandemics; possibly exacerbated by climate change. Being prepared to manage and control potential pandemics is best undertaken by an independent CDC that is resourced to undertake translational research and monitoring, and use data from digital health devices, genomic data, and other sophisticated modelling to support public health responses.

AIDH recognises that sharing health data and information safely and appropriately will be central to Australia's ability to manage future disease threats, as health data is critical in preparing, planning and responding to epidemics, pandemics, and the spread of communicable and other diseases.

As the Explanatory Memorandum states:

> The Australian CDC's enhanced national data architecture would embed considerations of health equity in the Australian CDC's expert advice. This includes analysis of disease burden across different populations. The Australian CDC would use data insights to inform effective, efficient, equitable and proportionate action to address the disproportionate burden of ill health among certain population groups.

As noted in our submission cited earlier, AIDH is 'comfortable' with the proposed use of health data by CDC; specifically, the use of deidentified data to prepare and respond to emergencies, including using data to assist and advise governments on quarantine measures, travel and other necessary restrictions of movement, and measures that might be required as public health responses.

AIDH supports CDC using health data for monitoring diseases potentially entering, or already detected, in Australia. We support CDC using collected data to provide evidence-based advice to governments about how to protect against diseases and other health threats and using this data to provide advice to respond during health emergencies.

In our consultation submission, we stressed that CDC must take every initiative to make sure the public has full confidence and trust in CDC, and in particular how personal health data is collected

used, and stored, and how collected data relates to each jurisdiction's public Health Acts. We said an Australian CDC must be transparent with any data sharing involving international or overseas organisations or governments.

To this end, AIDH is wholly satisfied our concerns have been met, as outlined in the Explanatory Memorandum:

> The Australian CDC would improve the way data is used for public health in line with the recommendations from the COVID-19 Response Inquiry, by delivering a modern approach to public health data to enable more accurate and faster detection of risks for national public health planning. The Australian CDC would use advanced data analysis to detect risks early and to support trusted, independent advice to guide effective public health responses.
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> The Australian CDC would steward improvements in public health for all Australians, by ensuring data is available for specific entities across Australia that are contributing to advances across broader public health activities. This would be facilitated through streamlined data sharing and linkage of Commonwealth and state and territory government datasets.
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> The Australian CDC's data capability is about shifting the public health system from reactive to proactive. By linking data more effectively and analysing it rigorously, the Australian CDC would support better decisions, targeted responses, and improved health outcomes for Australians.
>
> Data standards and strong governance would ensure that data are shared, analysed and used ethically and consistently. The Australian CDC would utilise and establish national data and metadata standards, support the Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability, and Reusability (FAIR) data principles and uphold the highest privacy and governance safeguards to give Australians confidence and build trust.

We also support CDC having a more direct role in countering misinformation campaigns about public health, which has been a significant issue arising from Covid-19 public health messages and vaccine mandates.

CDC can, and should, work with other health agencies and departments to educate and inform the general public about threats and responses to communicable diseases.

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About AIDH

The Australasian Institute of Digital Health (AIDH) represents a diverse and growing community of professionals at the intersection of healthcare and technology.

The Institute has more than 250 distinguished Fellows who are experts or pioneers in digital health, and has a growing membership of professionals comprising doctors, health informaticians, nurses, midwives, allied health, other clinicians, administrators, and health technology business leaders.

The Institute provides objective, non-partisan, and independent advice on the use of technology and health informatics to improve consumer outcomes and solve the most pressing challenges facing our healthcare system.

The Institute's unique composition and reach brings together an extraordinary network of Australia's leading digital health experts across the private, public and community sectors to advance our nation's transition to a digital health future.