

## EXCESS DEATHS MORE THAN HALVE IN AUSTRALIA AS COVID-19 EASES

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The number of excess deaths in Australia more than halved in 2023 following a steep decline in the number of people dying from COVID-19, [research published by the Actuaries Institute](#) today shows.

The Institute's Mortality Working Group estimates there were 8,400 more deaths in Australia in 2023 than predicted had the pandemic not occurred – a little less than half of the almost 20,000 excess deaths estimated for 2022.

As a result, Australia's excess mortality rate – or the number of actual deaths compared to expert predictions had there been no pandemic – was 5% for 2023 as against 11% in 2022, according to the Working Group's analysis of provisional mortality data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

The number of people who died from COVID-19 fell to 4,600 in 2023, from 10,300 in 2022, while COVID-19-related deaths halved to 1,500. The 6,100 deaths involving COVID-19 represent three-quarters of all excess deaths in 2023. COVID-19 was not mentioned on the death certificates for the remaining quarter.

Spokesperson for the Working Group, actuary Karen Cutter, said while Australia's excess mortality rate had dropped substantially, it remains significantly higher than the 1-2% excess observed in years of high flu deaths prior to the pandemic.

"It's encouraging that each successive COVID-19 wave has, so far, resulted in fewer deaths than the previous one," Ms Cutter said.

"However, we think that COVID-19 is likely to cause some excess mortality for several years to come, either as a direct cause of death or a contributing factor to other causes such as heart disease. In our view, the 'new normal' level of mortality is likely to be higher than it would have been if we hadn't had the pandemic."

The Group also conducted an in-depth analysis of excess mortality of 40 countries from 2020 to 2023 and found Australia's excess mortality over the four-year period (5%) was low by global standards (11%), but broadly consistent with the country's relative capacity to manage such a crisis. It was also not obvious that countries have paid an economic penalty for protecting lives; there is no strong relationship between excess mortality and shortfall in GDP growth.

The international comparisons also revealed that overall excess mortality across the period was largely driven by experience in the first two years of the pandemic. Countries that suffered high loss of life in the first two years generally had worse outcomes over the whole four years.

**Karen Cutter is available for interview.**

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Actuaries use data for good by harnessing the evidence to navigate into the future and make a positive impact. They think deeply about the issue at hand, whether it's advising on commercial strategy, influencing policy, or designing new products. Actuaries are adept at balancing interests of stakeholders, clients, and communities. They're called upon to give insight on complex problems, they'll look at the full picture. Actuaries analyse the data and model scenarios to form robust and outcome-centred advice.

