

## **Opinion Editorial**

### **Vaccination Passports – Health Consumers Tasmania supports vaccine passports in some circumstances**

17 September 2021

Increasing COVID vaccination rates in Tasmania, coupled with the spread of the Delta variant in some states and the negative impacts of restrictions have led to a public debate about whether people who are fully vaccinated should have greater freedom of movement, access to services or employed in certain industries compared to those who are not vaccinated. The concept is being referred to as a “Vaccine Passport” – which is a means of showing verified proof of someone’s COVID-19 vaccination status.

Recently, Health Consumers Tasmania surveyed 1,200 people across Tasmania. The results showed that there are many different and often polarising views in the community on this issue. Some people are rightly concerned on what impact a vaccine passport may have on their freedoms and their ability to fully participate in life, whilst others are worried about how safe it will be to mix in public spaces if some people choose not to be vaccinated.

With the increasing risk of the COVID Delta variant arriving in Tasmania, Health Consumers Tasmania accepts the need for the introduction of vaccine passports in some settings to minimise the impacts of COVID-19 on populations at greatest risk. The survey results back this up with 62.1 per cent of those surveyed supporting for vaccine passports in some conditions, with 34.9 per cent against.

Based on community feedback, Health Consumers Tasmania supports vaccine passports when people are required to work in essential jobs, and to enable quarantining in your family home (rather than in a hotel) when returning to the State.

Health Consumers Tasmania also accepts that a vaccine passport could be considered for those visiting vulnerable people or families in places like hospitals and aged care facilities, and for people who go to work in public places or where there are other colleagues present.

Based on the survey findings, Health Consumers Tasmania does not support the application of vaccine passports in everyday activities – for example, shopping for food, accessing health care (e.g., visiting a GP), travelling across borders or through COVID hotspots, education and attending public events or restaurants. Existing hygiene and safety measures (e.g., temperature checks, masks, distancing, sanitising, and checking in, as well as lockdowns as needed) are effective in this case. Community support for vaccine passports in this scenario falls to 41.1 per cent and those against a vaccine passport increasing to 52.8 per cent.

We do not consider that a blanket application of a vaccine passport is reasonable, necessary, or proportionate to advancing public health outcomes whilst minimising the

potential for discrimination in a way that divides our communities as they access basic amenities.

Health Consumers Tasmania encourages the application of vaccine passports be achieved in a humane manner that minimises social and economic divisions amongst Tasmanians.

As yet, it is not clear how a vaccine passport system would accommodate those people who cannot have a COVID vaccination for medical or other reasons, the vulnerable or isolated who fail to be vaccinated or those who can't afford smart phones (to display the passport) or how it will be rolled out in a way that minimises misuse or abuse.

Health Consumers Tasmania recognises the need for as many Tasmanians as possible to be vaccinated against COVID-19 to both save lives and to prevent unnecessary illness or distress amongst those who may need to go to hospital.

Health Consumers Tasmania supports the Government consideration to only "reopen" Tasmania once a significantly high rate of vaccination has been achieved (for example the reference to up to 90 per cent), and if our hospital system is unable to cope with a significant increase in COVID cases, some lockdowns or further restrictions may still need to occur despite high vaccination rates and the use of a vaccination passport. We support the Government's cautious and protective approach for the Tasmanian people in these times.