

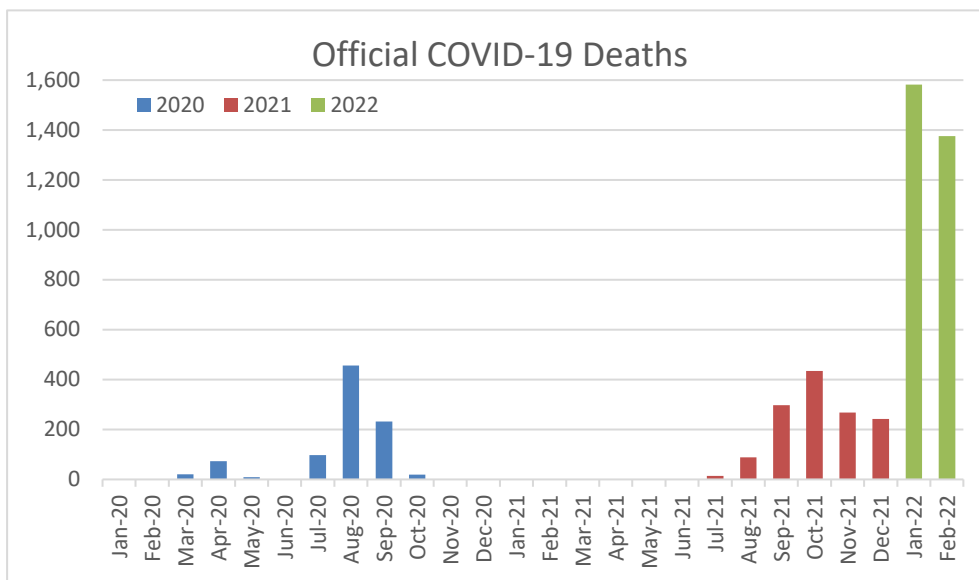
Recent COVID-19 deaths are eroding earlier mortality gains: Actuaries Institute

7 March 2022

- COVID-19 deaths in February 2022 are at a similar level to January 2022, and are again higher than total COVID-19 deaths in each of 2020 and 2021.
- COVID-19 deaths for the first two months of 2022 are more than double the total number of COVID-19 deaths for 2021.
- COVID-19 deaths from the Delta wave in the latter part of 2021 and the Omicron wave in early 2022 have almost fully eroded the reduction in deaths experienced earlier in the pandemic.
- Omicron is considered milder than Delta, but the sheer number of cases is expected to result in at least 10 per cent excess mortality in Australia in the first two months of 2022.

In February 2022, official COVID-19 deaths in Australia totalled 1,377. This followed 1,582 official COVID-19 deaths in January 2022, taking the total COVID-19 deaths for the first two months of 2022 to 2,959. There were 909 official COVID-19 deaths in 2020 and a further 1,344 deaths in 2021.

The surge in COVID-19 cases in December 2021 and January 2022 is expected to result in the total number of deaths, from all causes, in Australia being 10 per cent higher during January and February 2022 than if there had been no pandemic.



The Actuaries Institute compares ABS data on deaths during the pandemic to the number of deaths from all causes, including respiratory illnesses such as influenza and pneumonia, that would have been expected if there had been no pandemic. The Institute's model measures actual deaths against expected deaths, adjusted as the population ages and grows, and allowing for trends in mortality improvement.



Jennifer Lang, Spokesperson for the Actuaries Institute's COVID-19 Mortality Working Group says: "Australia's mortality experience under COVID-19 has evolved as the pandemic has progressed."

"In 2020, we had about 5,000 (3 per cent) fewer deaths than expected because of defence measures introduced to protect us from COVID-19. These measures did their job, and also eliminated the usual winter surge in respiratory disease," Ms Lang said.

"In 2021, deaths from respiratory disease were again low during the winter months. However, this impact was offset by higher than expected deaths from several other causes (e.g. cardiovascular disease). Thus, COVID-19 deaths from the Delta wave explain the 1,400 (1 per cent) more deaths than expected over the year."

"For the months of January and February 2022, if there had been no pandemic, we would have expected around 26,000 deaths. Based on trends and seasonality of deaths from other causes, we anticipate that *actual* deaths will have exceeded *expected* deaths by at least the surge of around 3,000 COVID-19 deaths. That is, we expect to see excess mortality of at least 10 per cent for these two months once the complete death data is available."

"Taking this experience cumulatively across the pandemic, we estimate that, by the end of February 2022, the better than expected mortality experience in 2020 will have been largely eroded."

Notes on the data

In forming our estimates, we have considered the question of whether the daily reports of COVID-19 deaths are in respect of people who have died *with* COVID-19 rather than *from* COVID-19. Recent ABS statistics showed that only 3 per cent of deaths were *with* COVID-19, and the vast majority of these would have lived longer had they not contracted COVID-19. There is evidence from the UK that the proportion of *with* COVID-19 deaths may grow with Omicron, however there is no reason to expect it to be a very high proportion of reported COVID-19 deaths – and these deaths will still represent a shortening of life brought about by COVID-19 infection.

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