

## The *Lancet* Commission on lessons for the future from the COVID-19 pandemic

The *Lancet* Commission has published a comprehensive investigation, analysis and response to COVID-19 which should be compulsory reading for all governments and health care professionals.

The Executive Summary states: "The staggering death toll is both a profound tragedy and a massive global failure at multiple levels. Too many governments have failed to adhere to basic norms of institutional rationality and transparency; too many people, often influenced by misinformation, have disrespected and protested against basic public health precautions; and the world's major powers have failed to collaborate to control the pandemic.

The Commission lists the following ten failures:

1. the lack of timely notification of the initial outbreak of COVID-19;
2. costly delays in acknowledging the crucial airborne exposure pathway of the virus, and in implementing appropriate measures to slow the spread of the virus;
3. lack of coordination among countries regarding suppression strategies and border closures;
4. the failure of governments to adopt best practices for controlling the pandemic;
5. the shortfall of global funding for low-income and middle-income countries;
6. the failure to ensure adequate global supplies and equitable distribution of key commodities, such as protective gear, diagnostics, medicines, medical devices, and vaccines, particularly for low-income and middle income countries;
7. the lack of timely, accurate, and systematic data on infections and deaths;
8. the poor enforcement of appropriate levels of biosafety regulations in the lead-up to the pandemic;
9. the failure to combat systematic disinformation; and
10. the lack of global and national safety nets to protect populations experiencing vulnerability.



The Commission found that countries with universal health coverage and health systems centred around primary health care, were able to scale up emergency services for patients with COVID-19, while continuing to ensure quality health care for health needs unrelated to the pandemic.

The Commission makes a number of recommendations to finally control and understand the COVID-19 pandemic and for countries to make the necessary investments to strengthen the first line of defence against emerging infectious agents by strengthening health systems and widening universal health coverage.

Their concluding paragraph is sobering reading. They say that the "COVID-19 crisis has exposed major weaknesses in the UN-based multilateral system, resulting from excessive nationalism; tensions among the major powers; chronic underfinancing of global public goods, including the UN system itself; lack of flexibility of intellectual property regimes to ensure that global public goods are available to all; lack of adequate sustainable development financing for LMICs; and the erosion of political support for multilateral solutions by the major powers.

"Despite major efforts to stimulate recovery and a just transition to sustainable development, the lack of ambition in the global response to COVID-19 is like that of other pressing global challenges, such as the climate emergency; the loss of global biodiversity; the pollution of air, land, and water; the persistence of extreme poverty in the midst of plenty; and the large-scale displacement of people as a result of conflicts, poverty, and environmental stress."

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