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**Date:** 29 May 2025

**To:**

**The Hon. Tim Nicholls MP**

Minister for Health and Ambulance Services

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**Cc:**

**Dr David Rosengren**

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**URGENT: Halt Destruction of QoVAX Study Biospecimens and Preserve Participant Trust in Queensland Research**

Dear Minister Nicholls,

As Presidents of the Australian Medical Professionals' Society (AMPS) and the President of the Nurses Professional Association of Queensland (NPAQ), we write to express our grave concern over the planned destruction of biospecimens collected under the QoVAX Safety and Efficacy Trial. This action threatens to erase a nationally significant research asset, breach ethical obligations to participants, and compromise Australia's capacity to investigate and treat post-vaccination injuries. It has also generated dismay among many of your natural supporters, those who expected a principled and transparent approach to legacy issues from the COVID-19 response. While past governments may have sought to distance themselves from the consequences of that period, we are concerned that the current course of action risks being perceived as aiding in that effort, rather than correcting it.

We write to strongly advocate the immediate cessation of any planned destruction of biospecimens and suppression of related data collected under the QoVAX Safety and Efficacy Trial (QoVAX SET). This cessation is critical to allow further analysis to take place.

This request is made on behalf of our frontline health practitioner members and in defence of the rights of the more than 10,000 Queenslanders who consented in good faith to contribute to one of the most significant vaccine safety studies in Australian history.

Below we outline a list of concerns that arise with the intention to destroy this valuable biobank and, essentially, bury important research. We trust this will make you reconsider.

### **Violation of Ethical Conduct and Consent**

From what we understand, participants in the QoVAX Study provided their biospecimens under a Participant Information and Consent Form (**PICF**) that explicitly committed to secure long-term biobank storage for COVID-19-related research according to its methodology. Premature destruction of these materials may constitute a breach of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2023), particularly clause 3.1.47 which reads:

In relevant research, particularly that which involves the use of materials of biological origin, records should be preserved for long enough to enable participants to be traced in the event that evidence emerges of late or long-term health-related effects, taking into account the conditions of consent that apply.

And also clause 3.1.49 which reads:

In the absence of justifiable ethical reasons (such as respect for cultural ownership or unmanageable risks to the privacy of research participants) and to promote access to the benefits of research, researchers should collect and store data or information generated by research projects in such a way that they can be used in future research projects. Where a researcher believes there are valid reasons for not making data or information accessible, this must be justified.

### **Record Retention Obligations**

Under the Health Sector (Clinical Records) Retention and Disposal Schedule, which is an authorisation under section 26 of the *Public Records Act 2002*, clinical research materials involving adults must be retained for a minimum of 15 years post-study, and 10 years following any patient contact or litigation—whichever is longer. While archiving records may appear to comply, doing so with a freeze on further research access is, as the public see it, essentially the same as destruction, as lessons may not be learnt.

### **Destruction of Potential Evidence**

We understand that formal legal notices have already been issued (including by Mr Julian Gillespie and PJ O'Brien & Associates) which includes information about a criminal referral to a public prosecutor, and therefore the destroying material reasonably believed to be evidence in future judicial proceedings is likely to be prohibited.

### Public Health and Public Interest

The QoVAX biospecimen collection is the largest longitudinal vaccine safety dataset in Australia. Destroying it would eliminate the only opportunity to:

- Independently verify the presence and persistence of synthetic DNA, SV40 promoter sequences, and related oncogenic elements;
- Investigate long-term immune, genetic, and inflammatory responses among vaccine recipients;
- Compare vaccinated and unvaccinated outcomes in a rigorously controlled setting.

The implications go well beyond academic interest. Without this research resource, Queensland and Australia will lose critical capacity to:

- Identify causal pathways in adverse vaccine events;
- Diagnose and monitor delayed or long-term post-vaccination and post-COVID injuries;
- Develop evidence-based treatment and rehabilitation protocols for those affected.

The destruction of this cohort would mean the permanent loss of real-world clinical evidence needed to inform future medical care and public health responses for a growing number of patients reporting long-term complications.

### Ministerial and Executive Action Required

We call on each of you to act immediately to:

1. **Halt all destruction** of QoVAX Study biospecimens and data;
2. **Ensure legal compliance** with the Public Records Act and National Statement on Ethical Conduct;
3. **Initiate an independent review** of the study's scientific and ethical value; and
4. **Guarantee long-term biobank preservation** until further notice.

This is not merely a bureaucratic issue, it is a decision that will affect scientific credibility, public confidence in government public health, and patient outcomes for years to come. It is your responsibility to ensure Queensland's research integrity is preserved, not erased.

A suggestion that there is no scientific benefit in this data, material, and research stands aghast against the limited comparable data available worldwide.

We urge your offices to treat this matter with the seriousness and urgency it warrants. The proposed destruction of these biospecimens risks not only breaching ethical, legal, and scientific obligations, but also irreparably harming public trust in Queensland's health and research institutions.

Accordingly, we request a formal written response within **24 hrs** of receipt of this letter, confirming that all destruction of QoVAX biospecimens and associated data has been immediately suspended pending further review.

Yours sincerely,

*Dr Duncan Syme*

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