

MEDIA RELEASE

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AVOID PANDEMICS WITH 'ONE-HEALTH' FOCUS FOR AGRICULTURE, HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Approximately 75% of newly emerging infectious diseases are those that can transmit from animals to humans. COVID-19 is a wakeup call to break down the silos of agriculture, health and the environment and invest more to focus on the overlap where we risk future pandemics. Australia's recent aid policy response to COVID-19 provides an opportunity to do this.

This was the message of two former senior politicians, The Hon John Anderson and The Hon Craig Emerson, who now sit on the board of the Crawford Fund, an NGO that engages Australians to train developing country scientists and farmers to improve food and nutrition security.

“In the wake of COVID-19, Australia could be a global leader in boosting aid efforts where the health of people, animals and the environment are interconnected,” said The Hon John Anderson, former Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the National Party, and now Chair of the Fund.

“Agriculture is at the critical interface of food, health and the environment and is an obvious place from which to work. Australia’s agricultural aid to our neighbours, which brings a benefit to Australian agriculture of \$10 for every dollar spent, could deepen its benefit to our neighbours and to us with more funding for an integrated focus on health, agriculture, food and environment.”

“The so-called 'One Health' approach is warranted, since it appears COVID-19 and SARS came from animals being in close contact with humans in food chains, such as wet markets.”

He explained in an opinion piece written with Dr Emerson and the Fund's CEO, Dr Colin Chartres, that with an increasing human footprint, the risk of future pandemics due to diseases jumping across the species barrier similarly increases.

“The 'One Health' approach is gaining traction as it enables the collaboration needed across different sectors and disciplines, working at the local, regional, national, and global levels.”

“Australia could be a global leader in efforts to stave off further pandemics by investing more in research to cover the overlap of agriculture with health and the environment, whilst at the same time helping protect Australia from emerging diseases,” he said.

Examples of some 'One Health' work underway includes research on anti-microbial resistance, food safety, policy improvements to veterinary legislation, biosecurity around threatening pests and diseases, and work to gain a better understanding the risk factors of animal to human disease transmission.

“A current-day snapshot of Australian biosecurity issues reveals we are fighting Fall Army Worm, Panama Disease and fire ants, while regionally African Swine Fever that wipes out pig populations has already severely affected East Asia.”

“Australia gains immense kudos and benefit from its contribution to international agricultural research, development and extension. The impact would be further increased if we boost efforts to include a 'One Health' integrated focus on health, agriculture, food and environment, as part of our current agricultural aid,” he concluded.

