

POLITICS FEDERAL CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

# Former top public servant: I won't download the coronavirus app

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By [Max Koslowski](#)

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121

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Two million Australians will have the coronavirus tracing app on their phones tonight but a top former digital agency public servant won't download it because of the government's track record with people's data.

Professor Lesley Seebeck, the former Digital Transformation Agency chief investment and advisory officer who is now the head of the Australian National University Cyber Institute, said the government had a history of grabbing as much data as it could under technology and security laws.

As millions of people download the COVIDSafe tracing app, chief medical officer Brendan Murphy has tried to calm the security concerns of some Australians over the data being stored and who has access to it.

"I am concerned because once these things are taken you don't get them back," Professor Seebeck said. "The government does not have a record of rolling any of these things back."

"We just want an app because we think it's a good idea," she added. "I probably won't be downloading it."

National security law experts fear that under the largely untested encryption laws passed 18 months ago, [intelligence services may be able to change the app's code to grant themselves access to information on the user's phone](#) - without a warrant.

The federal government has pledged new laws to [strengthen the app's privacy](#) and a ban on all law enforcement and Commonwealth agencies accessing the data. The app keeps data on a user's phone, and the information automatically deletes after 21 days.

Professor Seebeck joined New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern in being sceptical of the app, which Chief Medical Officer Brendan Murphy predicted would be downloaded by more than two million Australians by Monday night.

"I remain a bit sceptical about what it's going to be able to deliver because the uptake has to be so high," Ms Ardern said on Monday.

"We are working on it but I have to say our big focus has been getting our in-person contact tracing right, because we will all still be relying on that."

Professor Murphy praised Australians for exceeding download expectations and urged widespread uptake as the country announced some of its lowest virus infection numbers.

"I would be confident we might be beating yesterday's performance if we keep going," Professor Murphy said.

Health Minister Greg Hunt earlier revealed the app had been downloaded more than one million times in the 12 hours since it was released on Sunday night - a



Professor Lesley Seebeck won't download the coronavirus app because she does not trust the government with data. ASHLEY ST GEORGE

milestone he expected would take five days to reach.

"There is no magic number," Mr Hunt said. "Given that we're starting from something which didn't exist, any combination of numbers is an addition, so we're improving our capacity and one million's an extraordinary outcome so far."



**Greg Hunt**  
@GregHuntMP

1.89m people have now downloaded and registered for the [#COVIDSafeApp](#) as at 4pm today. This 💪 effort will help protect ourselves, our families, our nurses and our doctors. 🙏 AUS as we work together to beat this virus. Visit an app store & download today. [health.gov.au/resources/apps...](https://health.gov.au/resources/apps...)

**COVIDSafe app**

The COVIDSafe app speeds up contacting people exposed to coronavirus (COVID-19). This helps us support and protect you, your [health.gov.au](https://health.gov.au)

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Mr Hunt pledged that the app's source code, which the government initially said would be released in full but later said would only partially be released due to security concerns, would be made public within two weeks.

Shadow Health Minister Chris Bowen confirmed he and almost "all my Labor MPs" had downloaded the app but said others must make up their own minds, adding that the new parliamentary oversight committee would scrutinise the app.

Former Labor frontbencher Ed Husic called on the government to release the source code as soon as possible, saying he would reserve his right to delete the app if yet-to-be-seen legislation, to be put to Parliament in mid-May, was insufficient.

"The government should have released both the app and the legislation simultaneously," Mr Husic said. "I note it still hasn't released the source code despite being told it should."

"[The government] values headlines above hard yards," he said.

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