

Submission to the Australian Government COVID-19 Response Inquiry

My observations on the effects of the Australian and Victorian governments' response to the pandemic are relevant for the following people I am closely responsible for, either legally or morally:

Elderly family members in residential aged care

Peers in the paid workforce

Adult offspring in the paid workforce including those looking after young children

A school child, the youngest sibling of the above

Infant grandchildren, nephew and niece

Friends of varying opinions

I supported very carefully the restrictions imposed by federal and state governments, because not much was known about COVID-19 and it was rapidly killing alarming numbers of people in, for example, Italy, the UK and the USA

I supported and promoted the vaccines when they became available. I criticised the federal government for opting for the cheaper AstraZeneca when they could have chosen Pfizer from the start.

I criticized the federal government for being slow off the mark to get RATS into the country - this cost me attendance at my daughter's wedding, because I woke with a cold, which a PCR later revealed to not be COVID, but felt I couldn't take the risk of it perhaps being COVID and perhaps leading to other people at the wedding dying because of my attendance.

There were restrictions which I obeyed, but knew they weren't scientific and quite possibly counterproductive, like the requirement to wear masks even when exercising outdoors (unless you were a jogger or a cyclist). This led to people not taking their limited opportunity for walking outside in nature, and almost certainly contributed to the development of long term mental health problems still negatively affecting so many Australians.

The singles bubbles absolutely should have been there from day one - and actively promoted by governments to make sure no-one was isolated - the percentage of Australians who live alone is increasing and it is not good for any person to be isolated from all others for prolonged periods of time.

My school child had two terms away from school last year due to social and COVID anxiety and will need to continue psychologist consultation to maintain strategies to overcome these fears -

the psychologist was exactly the right solution to the problem even though it took two full terms to get the child back in the school classroom. I could afford the psychologist for my child, but the majority of parents just wouldn't be able to - next pandemic all school children should get bulk-billed under Medicare psychologist appointment so there is no discrimination of chance of recovery between the well off and everyone else.

The babies born in my family during the lockdowns suffered various developmental delays due to not seeing anyone but their parents - slow to smile and slow to babble. New parents were unsupported, which is dangerous for the babies too - we have a falling birthrate and everyone who does choose to have and succeeds in having a baby needs to be as strongly supported as is possible.

I strongly objected to fathers-to-be not permitted to attend the mother of their child's ultrasounds - our society needs to increase the sense of responsibility of men for the children they father and bring it up to the level of the sense of responsibility a woman extends to her child. Treating the father as unnecessary at any stage of a pregnancy is not what our society should be doing at this stage of the quest for financial and every other type of equality between men and women.

I felt the anti-vax response from so many was a clear indication that more science about vaccinations needs to be taught in schools - school children need to know about diseases for which vaccinations have made such a difference, and the science of how those vaccinations made that difference. We teach children in schools about why smoking and alcohol are not good for health and now clearly we need to teach them more carefully and thoroughly about disease prevention and vaccination science in particular.

On science I would like as much retrospective research completed as possible - I feel that even now the science on how effective masks are is rather imprecise and incomplete. COVID continues to sweep through aged care institutions with massive quantities of plastic PPE stuff going to landfill daily - why is covering the whole body in plastic necessary? I understand the science of N95 mask and visor when visiting someone infected with COVID because the airborne droplets enter through all the orifices of the face.

The main lasting effect the pandemic has had on me is to make me an aged care reform activist. I will never forget and never forgive the shocking realisation that the aged care system in Australia was so ignorant of both gerontic healthcare science and the human rights of those in the last stage of the lifespan that aged care facility managers were given carte blanche to deny residents in whatever way they chose and for however long they chose the visits of the Powers of Attorney they had appointed to monitor their care.

In residential aged care more people died of neglect and despair than died of COVID, because SHAMEFULLY Australia's 1997 aged care act separated the medical care of the very elderly into a cheaper far less scientific system, which the pandemic showed denied the very elderly not only healthcare, but their human rights

The aged care royal commission did a fantastic job of their reports “Neglect” and “Care, Dignity and Respect”, but they failed to appreciate the human rights aspects. Now we have the Disability Royal Commission report which fills those gaps and the two reports combined need to give those disabled by the ageing process the same level of human rights as the disability royal commission advocates.

Until the federal government legislates to make it immediately legally enforceable for Powers of Attorney to have same access as staff to residents in aged care facilities, I will never use residential aged care again and will strongly and proactively urge any fellow Australians I discuss aged care with against committing their loved one to residential aged care because their human rights are utterly unprotected. We would not allow our child to attend a school where the principle could make individual decision to keep the child and refuse the parent access. The pandemic revealed that is exactly the situation those that are unwise enough (like myself because I just didn't think that a country like Australia could possibly be so backward) to put themselves or a loved one into residential aged care. Effective legislation, preferably with admission of wrong, would be needed to change my stance on this.

Thank you hugely for the opportunity for members of the public to contribute to the inquiry.