

## **Submission to the Commonwealth Government COVID-19 Response Inquiry**

This submission is provided by Peter Wilkins PhD who is an Adjunct Professor at The John Curtin Institute of Public Policy (JCIPP) at Curtin University. He is a researcher in the fields of evaluation, performance, accountability and governance in the public and not for profit sectors. He has nearly forty years' experience in and around the public sector in accountability and oversight roles as well as having worked in line and central agencies.

The submission relates to the Governance term of reference and was prompted by the statement on the “Scope of inquiry” on the website stating that the inquiry will also consider how evidence was used or produced during implementation of interventions “... and ideas to improve evidence-based pandemic prevention and response practices”.

It is mainly drawn from a piece of work undertaken in 2021 and published in 2023 as a book chapter. The chapter is titled “The Role of Evaluative Information in Parliamentary Oversight of the Australian Government’s Responses to the Pandemic”.

The book titled “Policy Evaluation in the Era of COVID-19” has chapters addressing issues in other countries that may also provide relevant information to the current Inquiry.<sup>1 2</sup>

My chapter explored how parliamentary committees have responded to the challenge of holding Government to account in relation to its responses to the pandemic and in particular the role of evaluative information. It focused on the work underway by the Senate Select Committee on COVID-19.

Evaluative information can come from many sources including evaluations, performance reporting, and performance auditing and my chapter emphasised the importance of assessing its quality, including

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<sup>1</sup> Wilkins, P.(2023). The Role of Evaluative Information in Parliamentary Oversight of the Australian Government’s Responses to the Pandemic. Chapter in P. Eliadis, I. A. Naidoo, and R. C. Rist (Eds.) ‘*Evaluation in the Era of Covid-19*’. Abingdon, Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/Policy-Evaluation-in-the-Era-of-COVID-19/Eliadis-Naidoo-Rist/p/book/9781032452968> and available as Open Access.

<sup>2</sup> McGill University is hosting a webinar involving book authors, see <https://www.mcgill.ca/maxbellschool/events/policy-evaluation-era-covid-19> for event information and registration.

reliability, validity, credibility, legitimacy, functionality, timeliness, and relevance. The chapter contrasted the role of evaluative information alongside the role of opinions expressed by stakeholders.

The chapter referred to themes that arose from an analysis of the scrutiny of the Global Financial Crisis to identify measures which are also relevant in the current context, including the recognition of context; the need for clear programme objectives; explicit design principles; and governance.<sup>3</sup>

The role of evaluations and evaluators could usefully be assessed, particularly how they contributed information to inform the many decisions and judgments being made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It can have this role alongside contributing to learning and accountability. In terms of how evidence is produced it could be relevant to consider the extent and nature of coordination between State, Territory and the Commonwealth Auditors General to enable a consolidation of their findings.

Peter Wilkins  
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<sup>3</sup> Wilkins, P., D. Gilchrist and J. Phillimore (2021). Independent review of emergency economic stimulus measures: Global Financial Crisis and COVID-19. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*. 80 12-28. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12437>