

Commonwealth Government Covid-19 Response Inquiry – Submission

Terms of Reference topics/responses:

- Governance including the role of the Commonwealth Government, responsibilities of state and territory governments, national governance mechanisms (such as National Cabinet, the National Coordination Mechanism and the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee) and advisory bodies supporting responses to COVID-19.

I found the Commonwealth Governments' response to COVID-19 to be highly appropriate, given the information that was available at the time. The prompt closure of our international borders prevented the widescale spread of COVID that other countries had experienced. The Government clearly communicated to those already overseas to come home and they provided a deadline to do so. This was clear and concise information and could not have been handled better.

- Key health response measures (for example across COVID-19 vaccinations and treatments, key medical supplies such as personal protective equipment, quarantine facilities, and public health messaging).

Vaccinations: *I found the rollout of vaccinations to be appropriate, given the information available at the time. I felt that the relevant government agencies ensured that vaccinations were safe (as much as we could know at that time) and Australia took heed of mistakes that other countries had made. The only problem with vaccinations (at least for the first rollout) was that communication provided by the Commonwealth and State Governments was not consistent and was confusing. It wasn't clear who could get what vaccine and where. The Dept of Health website sent you to State Gov websites who sent you back to the Dept of Health website. It was only when I called my GP that I got information that was useful to me.*

PPE: *Given the immediate danger of the first strain of COVID, I thought that health providers were adequately and appropriately provided with PPE. Masks were easily available for consumers, and so was information on how to wear them. Despite that fact that there is conflicting information on their efficacy, I believe they provided comfort for people, especially those who are vulnerable. I personally believe they provided some protection against COVID.*

Quarantine facilities: *the availability of quarantine facilities was appropriate initially, however the state run quarantine costs and processes were appalling. My [REDACTED] was forced into quarantine in Brisbane with no healthcare provided. The cost was ridiculous. I felt it was a breach of human rights to force innocent people into quarantine, not provide sufficient healthcare or hospitality services, and then charge them for it. Her dinner was dropped outside the hotel door on the floor but she could not bend over to pick it up. She was provided with clean sheets but did not have the strength to change them so she had to sleep in dirty sheets the whole time. The Human Rights Commission should have intervened but they let this happen. Complaints to them and to state governments fell on deaf ears. This was not acceptable.*

Public health messaging: *I felt that communication by Governments was appropriate. The daily press conferences were very useful and gave us up to date information.*

PCR testing: *I thought that the PCR testing sites provided were extremely useful. Results were quick to be provided. This was an excellent initiative.*

- Broader health supports for people impacted by COVID-19 and/or lockdowns (for example mental health and suicide prevention supports, and access to screening and other preventive health measures).

Mental health was neglected by all levels of government, particularly in the areas that were locked down for significant periods of time.

Other health services were also neglected. People could not see their doctor. I understand that for minor health services this was acceptable, but not for more serious illnesses and for people with chronic health conditions. There will be long term consequences of this neglect as people with illnesses will have not been treated appropriately and so their condition will (or already has) worsened.

- International policies to support Australians at home and abroad (including with regard to international border closures, and securing vaccine supply deals with international partners for domestic use in Australia).

Australians abroad: *as above, I believe that closing borders and providing emergency flights for those overseas was appropriate. However many people who did not heed those warnings still expected the government to get them home. Perhaps there could be additional warnings for travellers (on DFAT or similar services?) advising them that you visit other countries at your own risk. The government can't be responsible for bailing people out all the time. This was a unique issue, and was an extreme event and so unexpected by most people. But the department of Health knew that a pandemic was overdue so could have pre-empted it happening and provided information on what travellers should do if the event occurred.*

Securing vaccine supplies: *I felt that the commonwealth government did a good job to secure vaccines. When appropriate, the brands of vaccines were changed, and age-appropriate vaccines were provided. Given the information available to the government at the time, I don't think they could have done anything differently.*

- Financial support for individuals (including income support payments).
The JobKeeper program was excellent. It was innovative and helped individuals to secure financial support. It also supported businesses as they were able to adapt their workforce according to the ever-changing rules.

- Governance including the role of the Commonwealth Government, responsibilities of state and territory governments, national governance mechanisms (such as National Cabinet, the National Coordination Mechanism and the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee) and advisory bodies supporting responses to COVID-19.

My main concern with COVID-19 governance was the way that the commonwealth had no oversight on how the states responded. I understand that under normal circumstances the states can control

their territories however when a national disaster like this occurs, the commonwealth government should be provided with the rights to oversee all state decisions.

The Queensland government did not care one iota about human rights, nor did the Victorian Government. The border closures between states were inhumane, and more akin to a Berlin Wall scenario. This is not acceptable. The state governments did not concur on decisions, the commonwealth was unable to intervene and the people of Australia suffered.

The NSW Government was one of the few governments that provided realistic and appropriate rules for the NSW population. They also cared deeply for the people of other states which cannot be said for the other premiers.

We are all Australians yet this lack of co-operation between state governments caused us to be divided. It was cruel. Many of the state premiers thought of only themselves and their popularity.

Next time there's a pandemic (or similar national disaster) the commonwealth government should take over and make border decisions and ensure that all state premiers work together for the safety of the nation.

The National Cabinet was rendered useless as there was little agreement or consensus on decisions. This was a time to forget politics and focus on the wellbeing of Australians but that did not occur.

The confusion around vaccine information (as mentioned earlier) could also have been avoided if there was commonwealth oversight over vaccines and information. There should've been ONE website providing information, from the Dept of Health. All state websites should have directed them back to the DoH website.

- Broader health supports for people impacted by COVID-19 and/or lockdowns (for example mental health and suicide prevention supports, and access to screening and other preventive health measures).

Lockdowns: Lockdowns were necessary, however some of them were ridiculously over-strict. In particular the Victorian government lockdowns were inhumane and people were treated like criminals. I personally knew people that were suffering as a result of this, and some are still scarred by the experience. Once again, where were the Human Rights Commission?