

I have lived in [REDACTED], Western Australia, my whole life. I am a middle-aged single man with no children and have worked in a variety of industries, from retail to agriculture to manufacturing to warehousing. Anticipating the introduction of vaccine mandates, I sold my house in early 2021 and moved into a rental property. I was a keen gardener and used to keep finches, but have given up those hobbies, as I now live in a small unit. I considered moving interstate or overseas, but the response to Covid was much the same worldwide. I resigned from my job as a storeman in January 2022, when vaccine mandates came into force in Western Australia, and have not held a steady job since. The Western Australian and Commonwealth Governments' response to COVID-19 has greatly impacted my life.

The COVID-19 Response Inquiry will be reviewing 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 understand that it is not within the remit of this inquiry to review actions taken unilaterally by state and territory governments; however, I would argue that the Commonwealth Government was complicit in imposing lockdowns and vaccine mandates. Although states implemented lockdowns and vaccine mandates independently of one another, not one state unilaterally refused to implement them.

National Cabinet — which includes the Prime Minister as a representative of the Commonwealth — was established to coordinate and deliver a consistent national response to the COVID-19 pandemic. On 13th March 2020, [Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced](#), '*Commonwealth, State and Territory governments have agreed to provide public advice against holding non-essential, organised public gatherings of more than 500 people ...*' [emphasis mine]. This marked the beginning of escalating COVID measures, culminating in the introduction of Stage 1 restrictions, approved by National Cabinet and announced by the Prime Minister on 22nd March 2020, plunging the nation into lockdown. On 6th August 2021, National Cabinet agreed to the [National Plan to transition Australia's National COVID-19 Response](#). Under this agreement, "highly targeted lockdowns" remained an option under phase three, which remained in effect until [6th July 2022](#). The Commonwealth Government was anxious to keep the deliberations of National Cabinet secret, introducing the COAG Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 to exempt National Cabinet documents from FOI requests. The Commonwealth Government demonstrated a pattern of evading scrutiny. [Parliament was suspended](#) from March until August of 2020, meaning that the Government could not be held accountable at a time when it was crucial to examine its decisions.

Recent studies suggest that lockdowns were of minimal benefit and caused significant [psychological](#) and economic damage. There was never unanimity among scientists over lockdowns. [REDACTED] were early critics. Based on [REDACTED] advice, Sweden refrained from locking down, instead relying on voluntary measures. 16,109 medical and public health scientists signed the [Great Barrington Declaration](#), along with 47,658 medical practitioners. The evidence cited in favour of lockdowns was always questionable. The figures coming out of China, which showed cases plateauing at around 80,000 in early March, apparently as a result of its harsh lockdowns, should have been regarded with suspicion, especially given China's lack of transparency in the early stages of the pandemic. And in May 2020, [REDACTED] was shown to be based on flawed modelling. Yet lockdowns

continued. National Cabinet and the AHPPC chose to listen to some scientists and to ignore others.

The Government also refused to listen to laypeople who warned of the harms of lockdowns. Throughout the pandemic, I wrote to politicians at state and federal level on multiple occasions. I rarely received a reply, and when I did, it was usually a boilerplate response, reiterating familiar talking points. Because politicians wouldn't listen and protesting was illegal, many in the freedom movement took to social media, where they faced censorship. The Commonwealth Department of Home Affairs [referred 4,213 COVID-19 related social media posts](#) to digital platforms to review against their own terms of service, many of which were removed on the Department's recommendation. Many of the censored posts contained statements that were true. Others merely expressed an opinion. The Commonwealth suppressed inconvenient facts, denied Australians their right to express an opinion, and ensured that there would be nowhere for the public to debate COVID policy. The argument that the states unilaterally imposed lockdowns, mask mandates and vaccine mandates does not make sense if the Commonwealth actively censored criticism of state policies.

Furthermore, lockdown opponents were relentlessly vilified in an attempt to demoralise and discredit them. They were labelled "misinformation spreaders". ACMA claimed that COVID-19 misinformation "[can pose a risk to the health and safety of individuals, as well as society more generally](#)". ASIO claimed that the far-right was exploiting COVID-19 restrictions to promote its narratives and recruit new members. Senator Kristina Keneally [repeated this claim](#), calling on the government to adequately fund programs to counter violent extremism. The Commonwealth-funded ABC and [SBS](#) published many articles portraying lockdown opponents as potentially violent extremists. In February 2023, ASIO chief Mike Burgess admitted that far-right groups had "probably not" been successful in recruiting significant numbers during the pandemic. This raises the question of whether there ever was a concerted effort from far-right groups to infiltrate anti-lockdown and anti-mandate groups. The claim never made sense. One would not expect anti-authoritarian groups to be fertile recruiting ground for authoritarian groups. I was a moderator of an anti-lockdown Facebook group with thousands of members, and I saw no sign of such activity. I believe the claim of far-right infiltration was propaganda, an attempt to establish guilt by association. Labelling someone "far-right" evokes the atrocities of World War II. "Far-right extremist" was probably the most objectionable label applied to lockdown opponents, but there were many others — "conspiracy theorist", "anti-science", "stupid", "selfish", etc. Knowingly or unknowingly, many politicians and Commonwealth agencies participated in character assassination, which took a personal toll on many lockdown opponents.

In August 2020, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said he expected that COVID-19 vaccination would be "[as mandatory as you can possibly make it](#)", adding, "I was the minister that established 'No jab, no play', so my view on this is pretty clear." The Commonwealth purchased enough vaccines for every Australian to receive multiples doses and distributed them to the states. National Cabinet set [high vaccination targets](#). The Commonwealth authorised the advertising slogan "We're not safe until we're *all* safe". The signalling was clear. The Commonwealth supported vaccine mandates for [aged care workers, disability workers and those in high-risk situations in the health system](#). It provided the infrastructure for state vaccine mandates by requiring COVID-19 vaccinations to be registered with the AIR and issuing vaccination certificates. The Commonwealth also assisted other countries in enforcing vaccine

mandates by providing International COVID-19 Vaccination Certificates. While they may no longer be in force, vaccine mandates have had a permanent impact on many peoples' lives. Vaccine mandates were a breach of the Nuremberg Code, which states: "The voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential. This means that the person involved should have legal capacity to give consent; should be so situated as to be able to exercise free power of choice, without the intervention of any element of force, fraud, deceit, duress, overreaching, or other ulterior form of constraint or coercion ...". COVID-19 vaccines do not prevent the contraction or transmission of COVID. There was never any evidence to support the latter claim. WHO data published in October 2020 suggested that the original strain of [COVID had a median infection fatality rate of 0.27%](#). Vaccine mandates were neither reasonable nor proportionate, and the Commonwealth was complicit in imposing and enforcing them.

I understand that this panel will look to submissions for ideas to make recommendations about how the Commonwealth responds to future pandemics. **In any future crisis, the Commonwealth Government must be open to scrutiny.** The Government's desire for secrecy damaged public trust. National Cabinet documents should be subject to FOI requests. Parliament should not be suspended during a crisis. Members can meet virtually if necessary.

Reducing case numbers and preventing the health system from being overwhelmed seemed to be the only criteria policymakers considered. **Any future pandemic response should not be based solely on epidemiological modelling but also consider the broader impact of proposed control measures. Politicians ought to question scientific advice and seek dissenting opinions before reaching an independent decision.**

During the pandemic, Australians were urged to exercise critical thinking and consider whether a source of information was reliable before repeating a claim. Politicians and Commonwealth employees should be held to the same standard. The truth was always out there. The bandwagon fallacy, appealing to a scientific consensus or to what other countries were doing, is neither a moral nor a rational justification. Following "the science" or "the latest health advice" does not absolve them of responsibility for implementing harmful policies. I often hear the excuse that they were acting on imperfect information but had good intentions. The zeal with which they maligned and scapegoated critics casts doubt on their intentions, as does their unwillingness to explain the reasons for their decisions. **They must be held accountable, both professionally and legally.** Laypeople, also acting on imperfect information and with good intentions, tried to warn them of the obvious disastrous consequences of their decisions. Policymakers have no excuse.

Commonwealth decisionmakers must also consider whether state policies are ethical before offering support. The Commonwealth is morally obligated *not* to support unethical policies. The Commonwealth subsidised lockdowns through schemes such as JobKeeper and provided ADF personnel to enforce state lockdowns. The states could not have imposed such harsh lockdowns for so long without support from the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth should not provide financial support or resources for states to impose draconian restrictions.

We must never see a repeat of 2020 in Australia.