

## **Introduction**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the COVID-19 enquiry.

I am a cancer survivor [REDACTED] and mother of two children. My youngest was born in [REDACTED] My oldest is [REDACTED] I was in active treatment for cancer from [REDACTED] including 22 cycles of chemotherapy, a long term infection requiring hospitalisation and several major surgeries. I am still undergoing regular monitoring and have ongoing long term effects from treatment. We live in [REDACTED]

## **Role of the Federal Government, National Cabinet, the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC), and the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI)**

I find it very concerning that in a democratic society the decisions made by the national cabinet were done so behind closed doors and kept secret.

My hypothesis is that decisions were made on the cost of human life vs the economy, how many deaths would be found acceptable and that is why these meetings were kept secret.

I also am of the view paediatric vaccinations were discussed and I am very concerned that there is no rationale why they were not opened up to any parent who wants to vaccinate their child under 5, as USA and many other countries have had the option for over a year now.

I would like to see national cabinet meeting minutes made public.

I would like to see evidence that the decisions made by national cabinet were in the best interest of Australians.

I would like vaccination for under 5's to be made available to all parents who wish to vaccinate their children.

## **Key health response measures**

It was devastating when the decision was made to open [REDACTED] border. I had just started [REDACTED] chemotherapy and was suffering ongoing issues with a long term infection requiring hospital stays and several surgeries to try to sort it out. Opening the border meant that COVID-19 would be let into [REDACTED] and I would no longer be safe. I was terrified and constantly having panic attacks. I was trying to keep things together for my young children. My [REDACTED] and I isolated at home for [REDACTED] months to keep our family COVID-19 free so I could finish the chemo and surgeries. My poor children missed out on so much. They did not get to see friends or family or play at playgrounds. I went through this treatment without any support with the kids except my husband who was working from home. I was exhausted, in pain and constantly nauseated. I homeschooled my oldest during this time and was also working one day a week. All of this for the decision to let the COVID-19 virus into our state. We had been so lucky for the whole pandemic up to this point and [REDACTED] had showed the world that things could be better.

The experience has been so traumatic for my oldest that he has ongoing [REDACTED] problems for which he is receiving care. I was unable to access psychological help or counseling during the time of isolation. I also suffered the loss of many relationships as so many [REDACTED] were ready to put COVID-19 behind themselves. I was told "hide under your bed if you're so scared" and "why should people miss having holidays just because

you're on chemo". I no longer talk to [REDACTED] who valued international travel more than my safety and didn't even take the time to drop off a meal or a kind word while I was in isolation. I feel if public health messaging didn't reinforce that COVID-19 was over, that my family and friends may have been more supportive in keeping me safe.

The broader comments on mainstream news and social media implied that my life was an acceptable sacrifice to make for life to go back to "normal". That the disabled were disposable, that we should be quiet and not make people feel bad for wanting to pretend their actions couldn't potentially lead to someone's death.

My last few hospital stays were especially scary as an immunocompromised cancer patient. Medical staff were no longer required to wear masks or isolate when sick. I chose to wear a mask during my hospital stays and was treated poorly as a result. Cancer patients are already very vulnerable and should not be in the position to have to argue with a health care provider to wear a mask. My surgeon and nurses wouldn't dream of not washing their hands and wearing gloves to minimise infection risk. Wearing a mask while treating cancer patients should be a minimum standard of care. I was repeatedly told that I was being too "anxious". Of course I was anxious. Twenty percent of cancer patients who get COVID-19 die ! [REDACTED] got COVID-19, missed chemo, and then died shortly afterwards as she never had the opportunity to have chemo again.

One positive is that my local pharmacist was very helpful - while I isolated with my family my pharmacist delivered my oral chemotherapy and other medication by dropping them at my doorstep. They also provided my vaccinations outdoors and masked. I'm grateful to the carefulness of that pharmacy and their staff. I also am grateful that I could access home visits for my weekly blood tests and they also agreed to do this outdoors and masked.

Lastly my GP was and continues to be fantastic. Telehealth is incredibly important, I feel the government should continue to invest in it. My GP also continues to wear a mask for face to face appointments.

### **International policies with regard to securing vaccine supply deals**

My youngest child [REDACTED] is still not eligible for vaccination. I feel that eligibility should have been extended to families who are immunocompromised. It was devastating to me to hear of the wastage of paediatric vaccine when I could not vaccinate my own child. I would have happily paid for the vaccine as I did for meningococcal. At the time I reached out to several politicians to try to get a vaccine for my child and they did not seem interested to help.

### **Financial support for individuals**

[REDACTED] and I were both lucky that our employers allowed us to continue to work from home and still allow us to do so. Our work is measured by our productivity not by presenteeism.

### **Support for industry and businesses**

I'd like to see more encouragement for businesses to implement clean air policies such as open windows and HEPA filters. Simple cost effective measures such as these go a long way in reducing staff shortages due to spread of illness in the office.

Businesses should also educate their staff about diversity in health. I was on the receiving end of a lot of sarcastic and rude comments about wearing a mask in the office despite my colleagues knowing I'd only finished chemotherapy a few months prior. This is ironic given I work in mining where PPE requirements are accepted.

Masks have been so heavily politicised that wearing one made me a pariah. Staff should be educated to not comment on mask wearing, just as racist and sexist remarks are unacceptable.

### **Community Supports**

I'd like to see more support from schools for kids wearing masks to school and more encouragement for daycares to implement clean air policies.

### **Targeted government response to the needs of particular populations**

I felt very left behind. The messaging was that the vulnerable were protected but I was not protected. I could not safely access hospital. Without the help of the one thoughtful pharmacy I would not have been able to access vaccinations or get my chemotherapy and other medication. I could not safely have scans. My young child could not be vaccinated. The only way the government protected me was to give booster vaccines. I contacted so many politicians asking for help and was treated like I was a pest instead of the terrified cancer patient I was, trying to look after two young children in the middle of a pandemic.

### **Australia's preparedness for current and future pandemics**

If clean air was implemented as a requirement for buildings this would improve outcomes for all airborne infectious illnesses. This should be developed and rolled out as an engineering requirement for all public and business indoor spaces. There should be minimum standards for PM10, PM2.5 and air change rates.

### **Summary**

Again thank you for the opportunity to make a submission. In summary the changes I would like to see are:

- Make minutes of national cabinet public
- Open up vaccination for under 5's to any parent who wishes to vaccinate their child
- Improve public health messaging so that cancer patients and other immunocompromised patients are not left isolated by family members who think they aren't at risk
- Educate businesses to support immunocompromised workers by supporting mask wearing in the office and working remotely
- Mandate masks in care settings for cancer patients - hospitals, scans, pharmacies, pathology
- Continue supporting telehealth through Medicare
- Encourage schools to support students who wear masks to school
- Initiate engineering standards for clean air indoors