

COVID-19 Response Inquiry – Submission by [REDACTED] [REDACTED] (Covid Conscious Mental Health Counsellor)

“Don’t worry about the world ending today; it’s already tomorrow in Australia.”
Charles M. Schulz

I am, fortunately and unfortunately, in the all too rare position of offering mental health support to those affected by covid and who do not wish to be infected with this damaging virus. It is a vocation I gravitated towards after witnessing extreme suffering from [REDACTED] sufferers and having my own struggles with [REDACTED]. My natural response was to jump in and help rather than accept the false narrative that we are living in a sustainable world with no need for concern.

Having talked with many people about covid and their experience of life in 2020 verses now, I can say without prejudice that one hundred percent say they felt safer in lockdowns and with restrictions in place. The lack of safety began when we saw the vaccine only approach was not going to work and public education failed to update us on effective masks, how they work, where they should be worn and who needs to wear them (everyone).

Government and Public health also failed to provide the sad fact that vaccines are not as effective as the virus itself. They do not, in fact, prevent long term illnesses such as [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], life altering and ending illnesses whose sufferers have been begging for attention across recent decades with no relief. There is no cure for what we call long covid and there never has been. Research is limited and the more people we infect, the greater the need for treatment. I repeat, the suffering is unfathomable and there is currently NO cure.

Government and public health also stopped releasing data and encouraged travel and working in person, a clear signal of profits over people. This has been hugely problematic for healthcare settings and schools, among myriad other public spaces. Those of us with health problems, who care for people with health problems and who wish to protect our health are in quite the pickle. Do we risk infection to care for our health or delay care knowing it is to our detriment? Covid is not a cold. It is not the flu. Covid’s insidiousness lies in its ability to perform cumulative, vascular damage. It could be after one infection, it could be after the 7th. Heart attacks, strokes, a sudden struggle to breathe or stand without vertigo. What science has discovered is that NOT catching covid is a very good idea.

- The huge challenges we face invite the following questions:
- What can we do in the face of friends and family who think the pandemic is over?
- How do we deal with systemic abuse towards disabled and chronically ill people on a much larger scale than before 2020?
- What can we do to address the growing divide between those who can afford protections and those who have to perform Centrelink’s punitive ‘mutual obligations’ often while chronically ill and forced to risk infection.

In short, this is the most ‘us’ and ‘them’ society I’ve seen in my [REDACTED] years.

Perhaps the greatest tragedy is how preventable these deaths and disabilities were and are. We know exactly what works. Cleaning the air is the first step to make indoor gatherings safer. Keeping the air quality below 500 ppm would help schools, hospitals, doctor’s offices, and any number of places people gather for leisure such as cinemas and restaurants.

Masks work extremely well but they have to be respirator masks. Surgical and cloth masks did us well in 2020 when cases were low and we had the upper hand. They are not much chop now. Government and public health messaging MUST always make mention of respirator masks when talking about layers of protection. I have had relatives in hospital overnight with only the 3M Aura mask and they all emerged unscathed. In short, respirator masks work. Add in clean air and we are well on our way to a healthier and happier society.

I never thought much about viral illnesses as lethal until I lost some crucial people in my life. I miss them every single day, it's painful. I do this work because of them and because of the people I have left who may not know what I do or chose to be cautious because of covid but they are precious and in the face of the deliberate misinformation, personal responsibility will largely lead to a majority doing what's easiest. I don't judge them for that but the cruelty, the blame that is piled onto those of us trying to stay safe and could be any one of the following:

- The six year old with cancer who is trying to stay safe and attend school. They want to wear a mask but being the only one is hard and the school offers no support.
- The carer who must work to support their elderly family while they themselves battle multiple chronic illnesses. This person is scared to mask in front of their boss in case they get fired and also, they are very scared of dying.
- The grandparents whose aged care home is having its 10th covid outbreak in a single year. Family (unmasked) insist on visiting.

To hold these people, these stories all at once is extremely difficult. We have been 'othered' for caring and that is causing a lot of mental distress. There is no such thing as covid anxiety in the context slung at chronically ill people via social media. The anxiety is caused by global gaslighting, misinformation and (because of 'personal responsibility') watching loved ones get sick and stay sick. The current situation has all the trappings of a bleak future and we see that. It is not a mental disorder requiring government subsidised CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy). That can do as much harm to a person's mental state as GET (graded exercise therapy) does to a person with post viral illness such as long covid.

I think the plan was always to wear us down in the interests of keeping the 2019 style economy chugging along. I didn't realise people would sacrifice themselves and their loved ones so easily but I see now how there is an almost impenetrable wall of misinformation and we've been given a wooden hammer to knock out the bricks. It is a seemingly impossible task without the help of those in power. We can achieve this by banding together. Sadly, the Australian government has left us more divided than ever. For our politicians, short term happiness seems to trump long term safety. It is that simple and the government is aware of that.

So what am I asking of you, the government who could make or break us? Firstly, we want a hopeful future. The reason I never followed the 'traditional' path of home ownership and contributing more to Australia's capital interests is because of my chronic illness. You can't work consistently and often not at all with a chronic illness. It's a very expensive thing to be ill, Medicare or no. This country is making sure millions more will face not hope but truly distressing debt, homelessness, inability to work and all while feeling like, as one sufferer of [REDACTED] with chronic pain put it when they were alive, 'like there's a chainsaw going through my chest 24 hours of every day.' That is a confronting image; I've never been able to get it out of my head. I wish for this inquiry to hear those words and may they lodge themselves in your collective consciousness. Our needs are simple:

- Provide clean indoor air in public spaces ensuring all new buildings meet this standard
- Provide paid covid sick leave for up to 2 weeks
- Reintroduce contact tracing and free drive through PCR testing sights
- Provide GP clinics with free RAT tests, vaccines and respirator masks
- Provide free respirator masks at public buildings such as libraries, schools and hospitals.
- Introduce a nationwide and thorough, science driven public health campaign about clean air and respirator masks. The public need to understand what clean air entails and that respirator masks are the only effective masks.

My hope is you rise far and away above the lowest bar and help set an example to the world of what we can do to secure a future for the sick kids, the (for now) healthy kids, the teenagers, the 20 somethings and every decade after the one gone before. We all deserve to live as safely as possible. Clean the air, bring back respirator masks in public spaces, especially healthcare settings and other compulsory spaces such as schools. To know and not to act is immoral and harmful to our fragile mental and physical health. I think we can do a lot better than that. I would like the rest of the world to wake up to Australia's tomorrow and for that day to be a beacon of hope.

Thank you for reading this submission.