

Commonwealth Government Covid-19 Response Inquiry

Terms of reference addressed.

1. Key health response measures
2. Financial support for individuals

I would like to express my gratitude to the Committee for extending an invitation to submit my views on the Commonwealth Government Covid-19 Response Inquiry. My purpose is to provide personal testimony and recommendations in relation to two of the terms of reference as they pertain to my individual circumstances.

Terms of reference 1: Key Health Response Measure - Vaccination

I am a [REDACTED] professional woman who, before my COVID-19 vaccination in October 2021 enjoyed robust health, an active lifestyle, and a successful career. Like countless other Australians, I genuinely believed that rolling up my sleeve for the vaccine was the responsible and patriotic thing to do—for my family, my community, and my country. I never once considered that I might be putting myself at risk of harm. However, just five days after my second Pfizer vaccination, I began experiencing unsettling flutters in my chest. These episodes soon escalated in terms of pain, intensity, and frequency. By the fifteenth day post-vaccination, I found myself rushed to the hospital in an ambulance, where I received the diagnosis of pericarditis. This injury was formally recorded with the appropriate state and federal health authorities as an adverse event following immunization (AEFI).

At the time, I expected that given the vaccine rollout was for a range of new products that had been introduced to millions of Australians through emergency use authorisation that the Government would have robust surveillance and monitoring systems in place to actively manage adverse reactions. Imagine my surprise when there was absolutely no contact from the TGA outside of the automated response. Not once in the past 2 years has **ANY** Commonwealth agency followed up the severity and longevity of my injury symptoms. This is an absolute abject failure in the Governments responsibility to manage harms and inform Australians as to the true risk profile of pharmaceutical products that they approved for use.

Recommendations:

1. Creation of an independent agency who is responsible for actively monitoring the longevity and severity of vaccine injury symptoms and accurately reporting these risks to the Australian public.
2. Removal of any and all pharmaceutical funding of pharmacovigilance agencies to remove any possibility of bias

Terms of reference 2: Financial Support for Individuals

With indemnity granted to pharmaceutical giants, the financial burden of liability is shifted onto the Australian taxpayer through programs such as the COVID-19 Vaccine Claims scheme. Initially, when this scheme was introduced, I believed it was a commendable initiative to support the extraordinary measures being taken during the pandemic and felt that the government was establishing a robust safety net for those unfortunate enough to be injured by vaccines. However, now, as someone who has experienced such an injury, I have come to the realization that this scheme falls far short of its promise and instead exposes the government's apparent lack of concern for the well-being of the people it is meant to safeguard.

Regrettably, the majority of injured Australians are ineligible to even apply for compensation, and those who do apply often face rejection based on technicalities. The entire process is

protracted, taking more than a year for most individuals, and even if one is fortunate enough to be approved, the compensation awarded does not come close to reflecting the level of trauma and suffering a person has endured.

It is of utmost importance that I emphasize the severity of this situation: I have endured significant financial losses (currently in the range of hundreds of thousands of dollars) as a direct result of the dual blows of lost income and burgeoning medical expenses. I harbour no illusions about the possibility of ever receiving substantial compensation through the government's woefully inadequate vaccine claims scheme. My family is saddled with an overwhelming financial burden, a deeply unjust consequence of the Australian Government's misguided decision to shield profit-driven entities from assuming financial responsibility for the products they distribute. The sight of these corporations reaping exorbitant profits at the expense of my misfortune and the misfortune of countless others is nothing short of a travesty that must never be allowed to recur.

Recommendations:

1. A complete overhaul of the COVID-19 Vaccine Claims scheme (or any similar scheme offered in future pandemics)
 - a. Extend eligibility to all harms caused by vaccinations. If a medical specialist identifies that an injury is caused by a vaccination then that should be sufficient proof to gain eligibility to the scheme
 - b. Remove the hospitalisation requirement given most injured try to avoid hospitalisation as the risk of contracting COVID was high
 - c. Similar to job-seeker and job-keeper payments, streamline access to periodic payments to compensate the injured on an ongoing basis. At present, the one-off payment compensation model is leaving injured Australians in severe financial distress while they are battling severe debilitating disability.
2. Ensure pharmaceutical companies are not provided with Government indemnity (no further recommendations are offered in this regard as this is being addressed by a separate Senate inquiry).

I would like to end my submission on a personal note. Ironically, prior to my COVID vaccination injury, all of my medical appointments were related to travel vaccinations. I was a strong advocate for vaccinations as a fundamental pillar of public health and had substantial trust in our public health institutions and the government as a whole. However, the events of the past two years have significantly shaken my faith to its very foundation. My confidence in the government and our public health institutions has eroded completely. Throughout my journey, I've had the heart-wrenching privilege of connecting with numerous fellow Australians facing the exact same ordeal that I now confront. Our suffering has reached an unprecedented level in history, and yet, not a single pharmaceutical company or government institution has extended a helping hand to ease our plight. Future pandemic responses need to address the abject failure of the Australian Government to acknowledge, treat and support innocent casualties of their decision making. May the lessons from this inquiry ensure that the current abysmal treatment of injured Australians never be allowed to happen again.