

To: The COVID-19 Response Inquiry Panel

My submission is as a member of the public whose professional work has been in the area of mental health and in the wellbeing of families and communities, particularly educational, church and local communities.

The purpose of this inquiry is “to identify lessons learned to improve Australia’s preparedness for future pandemics”. I am uncertain what is meant by “improve.” Every part of the response to this pandemic was messaged and done in a way as to create maximal fear. Fear hinders the capacity of human beings to think rationally and makes people more subject to control. Since this fact is well known, perhaps it was intentional. If the inquiry is about subjecting people to more government control, then my view of improvement is in the opposite direction. Improvement in my view respects and restores human dignity, loving relations and the social fabric, all crucial to health, while empowering people to think critically and find the best ways to protect their own health and that of others.

I will address these terms of reference key health measures, broader health supports, and community supports, and governance.

1. The public health messaging was terrible. It lowered the immune systems of the population through fear, divided people from the immune protection of social and physical contact, and did not teach people how to boost immunity and prevent vulnerability to illness. There were studies that showed the effectiveness of Vitamin D but no public health messaging about this, and more people spent more time indoors. People with symptoms who had tested covid positive were told to stay home until their symptoms were so severe that they might require hospitalisation. No early intervention was offered to help people recover and avoid hospitalisation.

It was portrayed that masks would stop the virus but the virus was found to be aerosol. Once this was understood, the negative effect of masks (reducing oxygen intake and increasing susceptibility to trapped infection etc. plus impact on human relations) were never acknowledged. It was announced that vaccines were the only solution and they were called safe and effective when there was no research to demonstrate this, and they still were pushed when enough people were having adverse reactions that with any other vaccine would have been stopped.

The failure of public health officials to adjust messaging once more of these things became known caused a breakdown of trust in the public health system and in the government. The heavy-handed responses of certain police and public officials and the construction of several so-called quarantine facilities that look more like [REDACTED] [REDACTED] has frightened the community has eroded confidence also.

2. The impact on the mental health of the community of fear messaging was to cause division and hopelessness. At the start people rolled with it because it was unknown and it appeared that the government and public health system were trying to protect the public. However, the ongoing measures with fear messaging and lockdowns caused many people to lose confidence. Some lost work or businesses or income or educational opportunity. The statistics concerning mental health problems among youth and young adults have skyrocketed and the suicide statistics also show the hopelessness. How many lives were saved by the measures taken versus how many

lives were lost? Mental health professionals and educators, also personally affected, saw their workloads increase and need exceed capacity. The sudden and protracted lockdowns, with heavily restricted access to the movement and so many huge disruptions to people's relationships and ability to function had huge mental health impact.

3. People's tempers found it difficult to manage being put into states of high anxiety and the impact on education was that many students dropped out. The impact on families was that domestic violence increased. The impact of violence or loss of income is that more people became homeless and some even were arrested for sleeping in their own cars. The community could not have been prepared for such increases, but messaging and actions that were calming, validating, supportive and encouraging would have had a different impact than the constant fear messaging and threatening behaviour of the government and health officials. If as is continually being stated in the media another pandemic is a matter of time, a great deal must be invested into public house
4. Concerning governance, the creation of a national cabinet with the state premiers shocked the community. That is NOT the way that Australia was constituted and it completely undermined confidence in both the Commonwealth Government and those participating from state and territory governments. In fact everything to do with the government response has created a frightening Big Brother spectre that undermines confidence in our democracy. Heavy handed responses to questions and protests, censorship actions, and the fact that more censorship is being promoted by our current federal parliament only confirms community suspicion that the government is not actually for the people or by the people.

The response to the existence of the covid-19 virus was to promote fear. Fear hinders the capacity of human beings to think rationally and to care about their neighbours. In other words, the response itself caused individuals, families and whole communities to behave in ways often contrary to their normal human capacities. As such lasting damage has been caused in people's relationships to themselves, to their families and friends, and to their relationships to all the social institutions that once were trusted. The fear and its consequences still remain, as do health consequences for some who thought they would be healthy if they did what they were told, or who did what they were told against their own best judgment.

Thank you for listening to these concerns.