

I am a [REDACTED] business owner who has an immune compromised sister and two ageing parents. Below are my thoughts on the Commonwealth Government COVID-19 Response.

Lack of public messaging.

Public messaging about COVID-19 has generally been abysmal. Health messaging has consistently focused on hand washing and social distancing for **an airborne disease**. I haven't seen any Federal Government messaging about airborne transmission, about the cumulative damage from COVID-19 or about clean air measures. The research is irrefutable at this stage (<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/covid-long-hauler-s-long-term-effects-of-covid19>): COVID-19 infections can cause damage whether you are young or old, vaccinated or not. It feels like the Federal Government response to public health messaging is literally: "Let's sweep it under the carpet and pretend it doesn't exist so people keep buying things and visiting restaurants." We have left immunocompromised people and people with disability in the dust, for the sake of the economy. And this applies to both the response under the Liberals and Labor.

This lack of quality public health messaging is everywhere. For example, lots of schools got air purifiers for classrooms, yet the lack of messaging meant that most teachers didn't understand the importance of using them. A consistent approach between Federal and State Government messaging is so important in this and other pandemics.

I've had heart palpitations since my bout of COVID-19 last year, and recently got this investigated. Apparently I have a leaky valve and extra fluid on the heart, both of which are linked to COVID-19 infection. The problem is, every time I go for a health appointment regarding this issue I risk becoming more unwell because there has been no public health messaging. As a result I sit in small, stuffy consulting rooms with no ventilation or air purifiers, with health professionals who aren't wearing masks and who dismiss COVID-19 like a common cold. This all comes back to the lack of public health messaging.

Poor access to up-to-date vaccines.

In my personal experience, the government's policies regarding vaccine procurement and access have been abysmal. We are heading into the Christmas period as of December 2023. We are in a COVID-19 wave, which we barely acknowledge because almost all testing and reporting measures have been stripped away. I am about to watch my family gather at Christmas and my brothers will probably bring COVID-19 into the house because the lack of public messaging has made them incredibly complacent. My parents will probably be infected, and they may well suffer severe health consequences because they haven't been able to access the updated monovalent vaccines. They are on a long waiting list because the Government didn't order enough, or order early enough. Aged care residents are also going into this season without adequate protection. As a [REDACTED] year old I'm not even sure if I can access a second 2023 booster with the monovalent option, because the advice directly contradicts itself. The same page says any adult can get a second 2023 booster if it's been 6 months since injection or infection, but then on the same website a table says it's not recommended. This

vague wording means that some pharmacists are giving out second 2023 boosters, while others are choosing not to. My doctor's surgery treated me like I was trying to scam pain meds from them when I enquired about my eligibility, because the new monovalent vaccines are so scarce and in demand right now. I feel guilty for even asking because there aren't currently even enough up-to-date vaccines to go around for older and immunocompromised people.

The Government is failing the most vulnerable people in our society but also failing every single one of us. And if one of us does get Long Covid this Christmas, we're on our own because doctors are so woefully under-informed - again this comes down to the lack of public messaging.

Inequitable access to support early in the pandemic.

In my experience the rich have gotten richer and the poor are struggling beyond belief as a result of this pandemic. I personally know several wealthy people who benefitted from grants and employment support, who laughed about the fact that they were essentially getting free money. I know someone who got a \$100,000 grant for a boat for their business which they are about to sell for a profit without having used it for any business purposes. Meanwhile, single parents and casual workers have had to go to work while sick or bear the cost of not going to work because there is inadequate sick leave support. People have been actively encouraged to attend work or school and spread a Level 3 Biosafety pathogen - all because the Government has shortened isolation periods, stripped reporting and testing measures, and taken away all employee support.

Suggestions and feedback for improving Australia's preparedness for current and future pandemics.

This response has been unconscionable. We are still living through an airborne pandemic, which is causing havoc on our health, civil wellbeing, education and economy. Here are my recommendations:

- Reinstate clear, accurate public health messaging about what COVID-19 can do, and how to avoid airborne spread: ventilation, air purification with HEPAs, and the value of N95 masks in particular.
- Clearly and consistently acknowledge that SARS-Cov-2 is airborne, and start introducing clean air measures in schools, public spaces and healthcare facilities.
- Maintain greater accountability with financial and business support measures. Fast support is important, but there should be a condition that this will be returned if not needed. No companies should be posting \$ billion profits while keeping free relief funds.
- Be proactive about vaccine access as waves begin to pick up. This means ordering enough vaccines as early as possible, rolling them out quickly and backing this up with clear public health messaging about eligibility and the importance of vaccination.
- Funding and consulting with informed, independent scientists. This means maintaining broad support of our universities and research institutions.
- Responding quickly to any new pathogens with a fast response. The border control early in the COVID-19 pandemic is to be commended, as this gave us the opportunity to get to

a high level of vaccination. It's just a shame that all public health regarding COVID-19 has been completely dropped and actively dismantled since borders reopened.