

15<sup>TH</sup> December, 2023

Re: Submissions for Commonwealth Government COVID-19 Response Inquiry

To COVID-19 Response Inquiry Panel,

My name is Elizabeth Bird, and during the pandemic I was working as a school chaplain and a youth worker in a town on the Vic-NSW state border. I have two main points of concern to bring to the Inquiry's attention.

1. The cost-benefit analysis of most interventions by the government were very narrow-focused.
2. The way vaccines were approached was severely misguided and damaging.

#### *Cost-benefit analysis*

It was evident at the time, and increasingly evident post-pandemic, that the social, educational, and mental health impact of the various Covid-19 response measures were not given enough weighting in decision making. Everyone suffered under the interventions put in place, and these 'health measures' largely served to simply widen the gap between those who were well off and those who were not. People who already had resources to cope (like myself), generally coped pretty well; but those who were under-resourced were further disadvantaged.

The response to the pandemic shook life entirely as we knew it, which is a traumatic event. Mass interventions are traumatic, and trauma is not helpful for human development and society's flourishing. Essentially, state, territory and federal governments were forced to consider the potential trauma of covid outbreaks with the enforced trauma of public health measures. Unfortunately, 'health' and 'safe' came to mean much less than just physical health and safety, and rather was synonymous with 'not having covid'. This narrow focus completely missed aspects of physical health beyond covid, along with societal, mental, emotional health etc. Future governmental responses to pandemics should take a cautionary approach to implementing public health measures because of the large cost these carry.

I am of the opinion that schools should never be closed again for a pandemic of similar severity; and mass online schooling should be avoided. Our children need to learn, they need stability, they need less time on screens not more, and they need to be given an education which online schooling was not for many. Working in a school, it was apparent how disruptive lockdowns were, and despite funding and covid tutors – money cannot replace time lost and it will take years after the pandemic for educational outcomes and behaviour to return to pre-pandemic levels.

#### *Vaccines*

Quite simply, the vaccine was a total gamble and the government did not seem to consider this at all. An excessively large number of vaccines were purchased, many of which had to be wasted (e.g. expired, not at the right temperature). The vaccines are not safe and effective, yet the government endorsed it. I received two shots, and haven't experience any side effects; though my sister had heart palpitations, another family member had heart complications and had to go to hospital; and another family member died – all post receiving jabs.

The federal government needed to intervene in state-based vaccine mandates which did more harm than good and left many industries understaffed which is quite clearly far more dangerous in many contexts (e.g. understaffed hospitals or aged care facilities) than not having a jab which did not stop

you from catching or transmitting the disease. The mandates were a massive overreach of human rights, and reminiscent of [REDACTED]. Maybe those who choose not to receive an experimental injection should [REDACTED]? Surely Australia's and America's [REDACTED] [REDACTED] has taught us that segregation is never justifiable.

Finally, the indemnity granted to Pfizer and AstraZeneca in the contracted purchase of covid vaccines which were still in trial was incredibly concerning. In my opinion, the government looks foolish and lacking a back bone to agree to such terms – is this the influence Big Pharma really holds, and is our government just a puppet? I hope not. The government should stand up for what is safe and right for its citizens in the event of future pandemics.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission,

Kind regards,

Elizabeth Bird