

Commonwealth Government COVID-19 Response Inquiry

My experience of Covid and Long Covid:

At the time of catching Covid, I was an active [REDACTED] who was running 35km a week, playing football in the winter and was a Customer Experience Manager.

Following my infection, I have had the following impacts as a result of Long Covid:

- I am now unable to exercise, with the exception of walking and for long periods of time, even walking was severely impacted.
- I have had ongoing symptoms, which for periods of time have limited my ability to leave the house and complete basic daily functions.
- At various times, I have had to scale down my work hours and then cease work entirely to manage symptoms.
- There has been a significant impact on my earnings.
- There have been impacts on my relationships.

In addition to the above, I have also had to navigate:

- A Health System that is not equipped to manage Long Covid.
- A Health System that is not protecting me from reinfection of Covid or other airborne viruses.
- A community that is not protecting me from reinfection, reinforced by policy decisions made by Government.

The Impact of Covid and Long Covid on the Australian Community:

Having experienced the challenges that I have, due to Long Covid and in attempting to avoid re-infection, I have observed the following challenges within the community, particularly for the most vulnerable.

- Children, parents and families are forced into continuous loops of illness, spreading through childcare and schools.
- Vulnerable people are put at risk, seeking Health Care, due to poor mitigations within Health Services.
- Long Covid sufferers are not receiving the support they need through Health Care, Home Care or financial assistance.
- Vulnerable people are not able to safely access shared spaces like shops and public transport.
- Workplaces are creating unnecessary barriers to work, by enforcing in-office policies, that don't support people with Long Covid (all chronic illness / disability), people with pre-existing vulnerabilities, those who care or live with people that fall into these categories or who understand the risks of Covid and want to avoid infection.

What needs to be done?

Based on my personal experience and the observed experiences of others in the community, there are a number of areas that can be improved, to support those with Long Covid and to reduce transmission, which will ultimately ensure that every member of our community is safer and healthier.

The first and most important action that must be taken, is to focus this inquiry not just on how to prepare for future pandemics, but to acknowledge that we are still in a Pandemic and to focus on what we can do now!

These are other key areas that need to be an immediate focus:

- Implement the recommendations of Long Covid Inquiry in full.
- Provide financial support for those who are unable to work as a result of Long Covid.
- Hold the Australian Government accountable for its own plan, which it has failed to achieve in 2023 in these key areas:
 - o Vaccine certainty – continuation of the vaccine program as a key means of defence
 - o Informed community, informed choices – increasing community education and engagement to maximise vaccination and treatment uptake, and community protection
 - o Taking the pressure off hospitals – investments to reduce stress on the health system to support timely, effective and affordable care
 - o No one left behind – additional supports for those who are most at risk of experiencing severe COVID-19 and for those who may have difficulty accessing the care they need
 - o Effective and fast testing – clear guidance on when and where to get tested
 - o Recovery – looking towards the future to address the longer impacts of the pandemic on the health of Australians, including long COVID and mental health
- Public Education – Ensuring the public knows about the risks of infection, repeat infection and Long Covid, along with information on how Covid spreads and how to protect themselves.
- Accessible tools – PCR testing, Rapid Antigen Tests, Respirators, Air Filters, Air Monitors, Vaccines and Anti-virals should be readily accessible to all and supported through government policy.
- Focus on development of better tools – Virus detection monitors, better vaccines, Long covid treatments.
- Remove barriers to working – jobs that can be done from home, should be able to be done from home to aid those with limited energy (Long Covid) and vulnerability (everyone) and should be supported by law.
- Re-implement compulsory isolation and payments, to support people with Covid to stay at home and reduce transmission.
- Implement permanent mandatory masking in Health Care, Aged Care, Schools, Public Transport, Airports, supermarkets, workplaces and other shared spaces, to reduce transmission and make all spaces accessible to everyone.