

I am a resident of [REDACTED]

The Federal Government did not introduce anti-discrimination legislation. If it had done so, for example, with the COVID-19 Vaccination Status (Prevention of Discrimination) Bill 2022 and the Fair Work Amendment (Prohibiting COVID-19 Vaccine Discrimination) Bill 2023, much of the antagonism and vilification over vaccination status could have been avoided. Unfortunately, these two bills failed to pass:

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/VaccineDiscrimination

If it had done so, those who chose to not take the COVID-19 vaccine would not have been ostracised socially and economically. These two forms of ostracisation, whether perceived or systemic, is what pushes groups out of the mainstream as they are not allowed to engage in open public discourse, or discourse in their social circles, without facing negative consequences.

These problems can be addressed in two ways.

Firstly, the Federal Government needs to introduce anti-discrimination legislation early on when faced with another pandemic. It should emphasise that this is not just about workplace discrimination but discrimination at large.

The derogatory and demeaning slurs “cooker”, “anti-vaxer” and “conspiracy theorist” have been used by the media with impunity to discredit and ridicule the unvaccinated. When introducing anti-discrimination legislation, the Federal Government needs to make the use of these slurs just as socially and legally unacceptable as the slurs used to denigrate homosexuals, religious groups and ethnic minorities.

Secondly, the Federal Government needs to provide more open support and acceptance of unvaccinated persons and the COVID-19 vaccine injured. To do this, it can have a more balanced use of the advertising budget and initiatives.

If the Federal Government wants to push vaccine uptake in the traditional media and digital media ads, it should also have ads to tell people it is not acceptable to partake in the bullying, coercion and mockery of the unvaccinated.

Given the number of COVID-19 vaccine injured, the Federal Government should be open to attending and endorsing the vigils and other events that honour these victims. This will create a sense of understanding and empathy, and people will know the Federal Government has the interests of all Australians in mind and the voices of all Australians are listened to.

In summary, my recommendations for the Federal Government are to introduce anti-discrimination legislation early on and provide open support and acceptance of unvaccinated persons. Thank you for your time.