

I am a mother to a newborn and I have an [REDACTED] condition that I was diagnosed with as a child, which places me at higher-risk of severe long-term health outcomes were I to contract COVID-19. I have spent a lifetime of diligently avoiding becoming a burden on the health and welfare systems by proactively managing my chronic illness and seeking stable employment to cover my personal health expenses. However, I am unable to apply the same principles of “individual responsibility” to keeping safe from COVID-19 because it is a highly contagious Biological Safety Level 3 airborne pathogen with high asymptomatic spread and there is no political ambition to eliminate or contain the long-term dangers it poses to **all** Australians. Personally, I am unable to safely return to my job once my maternity leave ends, nor can I make the unconscionable decision of putting my baby’s long-term health at risk by relying on unsafe childcare/school as he is ineligible to be vaccinated and unable to mask. If either my child, partner and/or myself were to contract Long Covid and become full-time carers, the reality is one or both adults in our household would have to rely on government benefits. This is despite **both** of us being able, very willing to work and extremely dedicated to our careers. We have both grown up with the values of working hard and giving back to the community, which we hope to instil in our child. My family’s situation is not unique, and it will become even more common as more citizens are disabled by Australia’s current “let it rip” approach to COVID-19.

Understandably, eliminating and mitigating COVID-19 is a seemingly insurmountable task with zero political attractiveness due to assumed short-term economic and social impacts. However, experts all over the world (including but not limited to: vale Mary-Louise McLaws, Raina Macintyre, Lidia Morawska, Ziyad Al-Aly) continue to demonstrate the real possibility and benefits of doing so, which will protect our country’s long-term economic and social wellbeing. As my personal situation is relatable to many young Australian families, regardless of whether underlying health conditions are present, I propose the below suggestions for how our country should/could be world leaders in addressing COVID-19 and future pandemics:

- Establish a single national body with experts from a cross-section of industries and expertise (e.g. biosecurity, engineering, epidemiology, statisticians, doctors/nurses etc.), all of whom have no underlying third-party political or corporate affiliations. Their aim should be to eliminate and contain the risk of all pandemics and promote public health and safety for all citizens. They would provide direct feedback and guidance based on credible scientific literature that Federal and all State Governments should then **unanimously** implement. Including but not limited to: the transparent dissemination of pandemic data, distribution of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) to healthcare workers and those on lower income, deliver consistent, honest and practical public health messaging that is accessible to all groups etc.
- Government health representatives across all states, public health messages and news media have consistently delivered the following dangerous and factually incorrect information about COVID-19: it isn’t airborne, it’s like a cold, it’s like the flu, masks are a “restriction”, masks/respirators do not stop transmission, wear masks to protect others only, vaccinations and hand-washing are enough to stop transmission, children do not get infected or transmit COVID-19, children infected with COVID-19 do not experience long-term illness, only the elderly and people with underlying health conditions get sick or die from COVID-19, clean air filters do not reduce virus particles indoors, transmission only occurs indoors, we are living in a “post-pandemic” or “post-COVID” time. All of these harmful “soundbites” have been repeated by several chief health officers and demonstrate an extreme lack of care for all

citizens, not just the vulnerable Australians they claim to want to protect. ***They must all be retracted and rectified as a matter of urgency.***

- ***Enforcing mask mandates across all health, medical and dental services in Australia.***
- Be a global leader by ***immediately advocating for and implementing universal respirator mask mandates*** in all public indoor spaces, starting with all daycares, schools, libraries and education settings for staff and students, and public transport. This would quickly and dramatically normalise mask wearing from an early age, which is especially pertinent as research shows future pandemics are likely to be airborne.
- Reinstate outdoor PCR testing centres leading up to and during pandemic surges.
- Similar to the United States, all individuals from the age of 6-months should be eligible for a COVID-19 vaccination, and eligibility criteria should be expanded for citizens to access antiviral medications. The country must also invest in scientific and technological innovation to drive research into next-generation vaccinations, antivirals, rapid testing tools and eco-friendlier mask disposal.
- Ensure all future and current public buildings are fitted with HEPA filtration to reduce viral particles indoors. Begin with all daycares/schools, medical/dental services and industries that drive the economy (e.g. hospital and retail).
- Legally enforce all employers to provide work-from-home flexibility options for all employees where it is relevant to do so, especially during (and leading up to) times of pandemic surges and for all employees with disabilities and chronic illnesses. This would enable more citizens to participate in the workforce where they previously may have not been able to, and would support their personal and economic wellbeing, as well as help contribute to the economy.
- Legalise and encourage controlled (obviously) outdoor drinking, dining and arts scene, similar to Europe. This would help reduce airborne pandemic spread and would ***easily*** stimulate the economy and promote art and culture across the entire country.
- Recognise the social, cultural and economic contributions we are missing out on by continuing to exclude individuals with disabilities and chronic illnesses from participating in within all areas of society. This discrimination highlights the stark reality that Australia's supposed ethos of "mateship" and "fair go" do not actually apply to everyone. It is risky to continue along this path of exclusion, particularly as repeat COVID-19 infections increase the number of chronically ill and disabled citizens.

Interestingly, becoming a world leader in mandating universal masking would promote the elimination and containment of COVID-19 and future airborne pandemics, an obvious long-term benefit for everyone. Eliminating and containing COVID-19 is a mammoth task, but to delay or to not do so will inevitably lead to disastrous consequences on a global scale in terms of slow but eventual mass disablement, dangerously stagnant economies, a loss of social/cultural cohesion and hindered scientific/technological innovation and progress.