

Hello,

My name is [REDACTED] and I work in childcare, specifically before and after school care. I have worked in this field for 11 years. I worked as an essential worker during the peaks of the pandemic, every day of 2020, 2021 and 2022. We as OOSH workers were considered essential and forced to be open yet did not receive the same support or supplies as early childhood or public schools. This was incredible dangerous, neglectful and stressful. We are caring for the same children in the school system so why were we not given the same support and safety especially considering we were open for essential families who were often at higher risk of close contacts. It was a harrowing and heartbreaking time and changed our lives forever and not for the better. We felt and still feel completely overworked, overlooked and underappreciated.

The government did not check in with us, we did not start receiving RAT tests until mid 2021. Staff were forced to work as we could not work from home. We also did not get holidays and had to work on skeleton staff for the majority of it.

Despite being essential workers in high risk situations we were not granted early access to boosters or given additional covid support.

When we did have staff test positive we had to do all the informing of outbreaks ourselves and close suddenly. Also all cleaning for covid was done by ourselves with no supplies or support from the government. There was no deep cleaning or anything else when there were outbreaks and close contacts.

Nothing has been done even in 2023 to change this situation. The fact that whole families are now being tested positive for covid but still are allowed to be sent to work without masks or any isolation. The children sneeze and cough openly everywhere and on staff and other children. This makes it incredibly easy for it to spread. Staff are also not required to wear masks despite being at risk and also if they test positive they can also work.

I was unfortunate enough to test positive for covid last year and was off sick for three weeks. I live alone and had no emotional or physical support. I ended up with long covid and it has been a physically and emotionally draining experience. I now have to see a doctor fortnightly and even a small illness can trigger severe asthmatic responses. When I tested positive six other staff also tested positive in my workplace causing stress for the staff working and also could have caused our company to close if we were under ratio.

I am now the only member of staff who wears a mask to protect myself and others. This causes incredible stress, especially during covid case waves.

The government needs to do more to increase covid safe practices such as mandatory air quality and purification set up in all buildings where people are unable to work from home or are essential workers (childcare, hospitals, doctors, schools, aged care). I frequently contemplate leaving my job and childcare and teaching are already suffering lack of staff because of burnout and stress as a direct result of the pandemic.

Testing needs to be more easily accessible as PCR testing has vanished and now requires referrals and can cost out of pocket which is not helping those with symptoms to get access to proper diagnostic data as we know RAT tests are not accurate especially with the newer strains. The lower social economic and remote communities deserve to have these available for free as health and safety is a human right regardless of age, race, gender and class.

The vulnerable deserve to be protected. The government's complete lack of COVID safety and strategies in all areas, especially disabled care and medical centers shows ableism attitudes and implies that the disabled, elderly and chronically ill are expendable. The truth is we could all end up disabled or chronically ill at any moment and that likelihood has statistically increased due to the affects of long covid.

Masks should absolutely be mandatory in hospitals and doctors and anywhere else that provides healthcare and treatments.

Information about how to protect yourself and where to access tests and protection needs to be much clearer and affordable. We have parents frequently calling to ask what the new rules are as the current information regarding covid on the government's website is confusing and vague.

My brother is severely disabled and when a staff member or fellow client tests positive they are forced to be sent home without care or support which can affect the families who need to work but more importantly the lack of COVID safety endangers them daily, especially for the disabled who are unable to wear masks when the staff are not required to.

Vaccines and boosters have been great and should continue to be free, updated and readily available for those who want it. Vaccination should be encouraged and made mandatory for those working in aforementioned vulnerable settings (medical exemptions excluded)

Moving forward there needs to be more dedicated services for support and treatment of long covid, protection and prevention of COVID is paramount to minimise risk and make the world safer and more enjoyable. We have not gone back to normal. That concept is negligent and dismissive of the people suffering and dying everyday around the world from covid.

Please push to make the world safer to protect us from this current pandemic and be more prepared for future pandemics.

Thankyou for your time.

Kind regards,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the sender.