

1. Introduce yourself, and explain a little about why your voice is important

I am a stay at home mother to [REDACTED]

2. What are your suggestions and feedback about the role of the Federal Government, National Cabinet, the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) and/or other advisory bodies?

My feedback regarding the role played by ATAGI is as follows. By not allowing my [REDACTED] child to receive any booster since their original course in March 2022, and completely denying my [REDACTED] any covid vaccine they have essentially doomed us to a life of self-imposed isolation. As someone who has always stayed updated with the latest science from around the world on long term sequelae, I am not willing to risk Long Covid or any long term disability for my children (or myself). Their advice is out of step with the US who is allowing boosters for children aged six months and up.

Advice given to government from Australia's Chief Medical Officer was poor. As an airborne virus the messaging has been atrocious. Hand washing and staying two metres apart when the virus can hang in the air in an empty room for hours (like cigarette smoke) is inadequate. The public has not been advised fully of the long term risks of this disease. If the Chief Health Officer was any good at their job they would advise the government to share adequate public health measures, and encourage high quality masks, ventilation, paid sick leave for workers to prevent transmission. Instead we have a vaccine only strategy... without the vaccines (see paragraph above regarding unable to be vaccinated [REDACTED]).

The personal impact of the decisions made by National Cabinet has been that I am estranged from [REDACTED] who thinks I'm selfish and inconsiderate for asking to hold a family Christmas outdoors. Other [REDACTED] think I am overreacting.

Family all live [REDACTED] so organising to see them now also includes asking them to wear masks indoors, cut out their socialising, and test for a week prior.

My [REDACTED] has called me a [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and I am stuck in this relationship because if we had to share custody I would not be able to protect my children from Covid while they were in his care. If we were not in this pandemic there is a very high chance I would ask to separate.

I am stuck still breastfeeding the [REDACTED] as it is the only protection from Covid she is allowed.

My family all wear high quality N95 level masks indoors. My [REDACTED] refuses to go places indoors with our children when we are masked, he feels embarrassed and that people are judging him for it. This leaves all such outings to me.

Instead of sending our [REDACTED] to school to be either made uncomfortable for wearing a mask, or to risk repeated reinfection we have registered for homeschooling. There is no extra financial help for homeschooling families despite schools being allocated funds per student. As a single income family this has been a bit of a financial hit.

We are also in the process of obtaining an [REDACTED] assessment for [REDACTED] I have zero respite. I am parenting 24/7. It has been a very long two years.

We have had many medical appointments in the past year, and as if the mental load for taking a child to appointments wasn't heavy enough, now I have the added tasks of asking each provider about their ventilation/air quality, booking the first appointment of the day, and requesting the provider wear a mask. Safe healthcare should be the default. Back when my [REDACTED] was younger and unable to mask I would also take my own HEPA to Maternal & Child Health because they did not have their own.

My [REDACTED] has always wanted to be an Olympic swimmer for Australia. Swimming (up until Nov 2021 when I stopped lessons) was her favourite thing. Unfortunately you cannot wear a mask in a pool, and so we have to make do with the one week per year of VIC swim offered at a nearby outdoor pool. Even this is not risk free as children are sitting practically on top of each other at the end of the pool while waiting for their turn. We have looked into private lessons but they are expensive (we don't qualify for the government sport voucher), and the outdoor pool is only open Dec-March.

My suggestions going forward are

- the government reinstate masks in healthcare (including pharmacies where sick people go!) permanently
- that public services such as libraries etc have masked days or hours to allow vulnerable people to access those spaces more safely
- That those of us who wish to vaccinate and boost our 6 months plus children be allowed to do so.
- upgrade ventilation in all public buildings and provide grants for businesses to do the same. Aim for real-time CO2 monitoring displays like they are implementing in Japan.
- allow PCR tests without a GP referral as rapid antigen tests are expensive, and don't always work.

3. What are your suggestions and feedback about key health response measures, e.g. COVID-19 vaccinations and treatments, key medical supplies such as personal protective equipment, quarantine facilities, and public health messaging?

In my personal experience, COVID-19 vaccinations have allowed me to stop worrying so much about the acute phase for my partner, my [REDACTED] (although ideally she would be able to have a booster), and myself.

The two main concerns I now have are:

-my unvaccinated [REDACTED] who had terrible croup when we had our first and only known Covid infection over Christmas 2022.

-Vaccination does not prevent Long Covid. With all the data on how covid can infect every organ in the body, and can persist for some time, it does not make sense to allow rampant transmission through the community. I am not comfortable (nor consenting) gambling my health or the health of my children.

Regarding PPE, in the future the federal government needs to mandate N95 level masks in healthcare. Visibly recommend high quality masks indoors and in all crowded areas outdoors (instead of hiding the advice on a website, take out advertising space and make it known!).

The Federal Health department could improve Public Health messaging by giving information based on protecting yourself and others from airborne transmission. Advice to wash hands (while important) is only applicable to fomite transmission. Covid is airborne!

4. What are your suggestions and feedback about international policies with regard to securing vaccine supply deals?

The impact of the government's vaccine eligibility policy on me/my family has been that my [REDACTED] was infected without any protection except whatever antibodies she obtained through my breastmilk. I can only hope it helped to mitigate the damage to her organs somewhat. I will hold the Australian government personally responsible for any future health issues as a result of her (and our) infections.

5. What are your suggestions and feedback about financial support for individuals?

In my personal experience, the government's policies regarding financial support during the pandemic have been woeful since National Cabinet decided to 'let it rip'.

The impact of the removal of isolation income support was that people couldn't afford to stay home when sick. Didn't have to be an economist to see that would cause businesses to have issues with staffing. Prior to removing all protections I had never seen so many local businesses posting on Facebook that they would be closed due to staffing issues.

Financial support could be improved by implementing isolation payments again and/or providing all workers with additional paid sick leave guarantees in their awards.

I found JobSeeker was really helpful when I was on it. It allowed us to pay all our rent/bills without stressing, and also put some money away in savings each fortnight.