

Commonwealth Government Covid-19 Response Inquiry Submission

Krystle Mitchell
15/12/2023

Professional Background Information;

1. My name is Krystle Mitchell, I am a Victorian resident, and lived here my whole life. Firstly, I apologise that my submission is not articulated and complete, however due to the limited time the Government has provided citizens to make these submissions, as well as the limited coverage via media and Government heads on the issue, I have put this submission together to the best of my ability. It is likely to not cover everything I would have submitted, had we been given sufficient time to prepare; That it to say, this submission is not a full and complete digest of the impacts of the Government's Response to Covid-19.
2. I became a Victorian police officer in October 2005, and served for 16 years, (full time service, with a six month stint in Northern Territory police). I performed active front line duties in Metro, Country and Regional areas for 6 years, before joining Professional Standards Command as an Intelligence Analyst. I then went on to complete my degree in Intel Analytics, eventually getting promoted to Sergeant through various secondments (including the Conduct Unit (triaging of police complaints), and the Use of Force office (improving analytical insight into Use of Force incidents), before securing my promotion to Sergeant and becoming the Officer in charge of the intelligence unit of Family Violence Command Taskforce. After a few short years, I then went to the Melbourne Prosecution's unit where I performed Family Violence prosecutor duties, and was performing this role when the Covid-19 pandemic began. During the pandemic, I was upgraded to Senior Sergeant at Gender Equality and Inclusion Command, and began my Master's in Police Leadership and Management. I concluded my time as an officer at this location in November 2021.

Purpose of my Submission and endorsement of others;

3. I make this submission with the clear intent to provide 'on the ground' information to the inquiry panel, to support improved pandemic responses. I acknowledge my previous public and negative expressions towards the State Government responses here in Victoria. As we accept judges are able to be aware of, and overcome their biases in a court of law to interpret the law without fear or favour, I ask the panel to accept that I, as a veteran police officer who served with an unblemished record, a professional background in data analytics (whereby confronting & managing biases are par for course), that you can accept my submission with the intent that it has been provided.
4. With that said, as my intent is to provide information to support improved pandemic responses for the future, I would still like it on record, that I vehemently oppose the draconian, disproportionate, zealous, harmful, wasteful and in my opinion undemocratic, illegal and unethical responses by Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments.
5. My submission is narrowed to police responses and experiences.
6. I fully support and endorse the submissions of The Libertarian Party, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

Out of Scope Information;

I understand that this inquiry [the Government] has chosen to not put in scope:

- Actions taken unilaterally by state and territory governments.
7. The information provided in this submission is to ensure that the Independent Panel have context to, and an appreciation for the consequences of State-based decisions, so that in their consideration of recommendations for future pandemics, they can do so with awareness of the 'on the ground' impacts of decisions made during Covid-19.

The police perspective;

8. Police were a front-line response in dealing with people suffering mental health issues and suicidal ideation, generally when those conditions were at their worst, and the person was presenting in crisis.
9. Due to the nature of lockdowns, reduced capacity of virtually every service available, and mask mandates (that were strictly enforced in Victoria), these people unnecessarily suffered, and were delayed health care, which adversely affected their opportunity for improved health outcomes. (Mask mandate specifically mentioned as a significant barrier to communication, & the additional fear factor to people who couldn't see the face of the person they were talking to).
10. Whilst prevention supports, access to screening and other preventive health measures would likely see an improvement in this area, consideration ought to be given to the "crisis point", and what alleviations can be made in those moments.
11. Additionally, a significant amount of public awareness campaigns on monitoring and managing mental health, as well clarity on "the rules" during a pandemic should be considered. Many people were overwhelmed with restriction information, scared to break the rules, and often isolated themselves to their own detriment, or in one example below - felt forced to 'out' themselves to police.

On the Ground Examples;

12. My husband was

13.

14.

15. During the Ring of Steel, the operation was being performed adequately by the front-line members, who were managing to have vehicles move through the checkpoints relatively quickly. This changed when information came down through the chain of command that 'the powers that be' wanted to see a minimum 45-minute wait time for the queue of vehicles going through the checkpoints. As to where this direction/ influence for this decision came from, it was unlikely to have come from police, given the safety issues the new instructions caused, (multiple car accidents), and driver fatigue of those going long distances and having the additional driving time placed on them. The delay did however create some excellent media coverage of long queues and a 'police will catch you' narrative that was used by the Premier about the Ring of Steel.
16. Predominantly the Ring of Steel delayed Doctors, Nurses, Dentists, other health care professionals, and essential workers from getting to their workplaces and destinations, and cost the Victorian tax-payer a considerable amount of money in police over-time and diverted resources.
17. As a Family Violence Prosecutor, I saw a significant increase in the number of (non-violent) Family Violence incidents in homes that had never previously had a police interaction (or reports for family violence). These normal households which were put in pressure cooker situations of children studying at home, one parent usually working from home, (whilst trying to manage the children), and one parent either at work as an essential worker, or staying at home getting depressed and drinking, which naturally led to more arguments. Police have a mandated response when attending family violence, and this forced-response did not work for the uniqueness of Covid-19. We saw more families put through the Intervention order system, that simply didn't need to be there. We added unnecessary stress to an already very stressful environment, and wasted precious court time over matters that did not need police action.
18. These situations (and many more like it), could have been avoided through a number of measures or reduced government intervention, (which I appreciate are out of scope of this inquiry), however what the Commonwealth ought to consider in its decision-making processes in the next pandemic – is the flow on consequences and likely State-based government response (to whatever edict comes from Canberra). Consideration to these types of real-life events should form part of the decision-making process, even if the real-life events themselves cannot be given any commentary by this inquiry.
19. CAD Data (triple zero calls and initial triage of emergency calls), 83's (Report of Death to the Coroner) and Section 351 data (Police Mental Health Transfer) should be considered by the inquiry if it is at all interested in the *real* statistics of the number of Victorians that died by suicide during the period March 2020 to May 2023, the number of mental health transfers conducted by police officers, and the number of family violence incident's they attended. This data can be compared to the preceding March 2017 to May 2019 period, and ratioed for population differences. This data may assist in the considerations of expected resources for future pandemics.
20. I reserve my last paragraph to acknowledge the many Australian citizens who suffered unimaginable pain (through the loss of loved ones for whatever reason) during the Governments response to Covid-19, where you were denied access to them while they suffered, or in their final moments where you couldn't visit them, or where they were denied adequate medical treatment, or where you were denied the ability to send them off with family and friends. I am deeply sorry for your loss, and I am sorry for your suffering, especially when it could have been so easily avoided. To all the business owners who had to close while big corporations made more profit than ever before – I am sorry that Government intervention was the cause of your closure, but give it another go if you can! Australia needs small business owners. To all the children – I am sorry we didn't fight harder for you, it will be one of this generation's biggest failures – we let you down.