

14/12/2023

To the COVID-19 Response Inquiry Panel,

**Submission regarding the COVID-19 Response Inquiry's terms of reference**

I have responded to four areas as follows:

- **Governance including the role of the Commonwealth Government, responsibilities of state and territory governments, national governance mechanisms (such as National Cabinet, the National Coordination Mechanism and the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee) and advisory bodies supporting responses to COVID-19.**

My first comment, this is a very important enquiry and **there was insufficient time allowed by this Commonwealth Government COVID-19 Response Inquiry to write a submission that includes substantial references.** Once I found out submissions were open I had only 3 days notice to be able to write this response. This has occurred mid-week while I am busy working and two weeks from Christmas. Nevertheless, I am taking the time to write a response due to the importance of this issue and will write in accordance with my understanding with the references I can find easily at hand. The lack of time allowed for the preparation of these responses is in and of itself a concern. I believe several months should be allowed.. I request for the time to be extended so more people can make submissions and provide the supporting documentation.

In terms of governance, it is my understanding that the Commonwealth Government did not implement the pandemic response in accordance with what had been previously planned. **It is my understanding that lockdowns were not part of the pre-existing pandemic response plan.** Yet lockdowns were implemented very early on from February and March 2020. **I saw the lockdowns as disastrous for the economic and social welfare of the country and am not alone in this view.**

Our nation has a history of courageously facing adversity and rising to face problems. This is effectively the ANZAC spirit. What I saw in terms of governance was a **cowardly and fear based response** that was driven by Commonwealth Government with the Prime Minister Scott Morrison as the main spokesperson. **What is required in response to any threat is courage, clarity of mind, appraisal, monitoring and evaluation, rationality and care, not fear and authoritarian directives that remove freedoms as a first response.**

Again, in relation to governance, I have concerns regarding the decision-making processes. I appeared to me that there was a **breakdown of democratic process due to removal of free speech.** Free speech underpins democracy. Without free speech healthy debate is shut down with subsequent broad reaching implications for decision making and outcomes. During COVID-19 the Commonwealth Government and Advisory bodies endorsed decisions that appeared to be inappropriate at best, but one could argue **the subsequent decisions were in breach of human rights resulting in hardship greater than the COVID-19 disease itself.** The result of silencing dissenting views was that Advisory bodies appeared to give one unified message supporting the Commonwealth Government's point of view and directives, whereas, in reality, there were many professionals concerned about the direction the government was taking. I can give one example:

There were health practitioners and advisors that did not support lockdown measures, masking and vaccinations as the primary health response to COVID-19 yet they were ignored and indeed silenced. I understand that GP's and health practitioners were advised in writing, driven by the leadership of the Commonwealth Government, that they could not have open conversations with patients

providing informed consent around vaccine efficacy and safety. This is completely unacceptable. Open discussion at all levels is a requirement to find the best solution to complex problems. The Australian Medical Professional Society is one such group of concerned health professionals that have been ignored and not given representation. They represent a society of medical professionals who wish to provide an alternative voice to the AMA who are currently silenced by AHPRA.

[https://amps.redunion.com.au/covid19\\_evidence\\_based\\_information](https://amps.redunion.com.au/covid19_evidence_based_information)

Our Prime Minister and the Commonwealth Government initiated **a response which was massively disproportionate the threat**. Especially once it became clear that the death rate from COVID-19 was considerably lower than first feared, the measures should have been reviewed and reversed, particularly as the measures significantly impacted basic human rights and freedoms.

The Commonwealth Government's response to COVID-19 may be **in breach of human rights as per the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** which sets out fundamental human rights. Article 3 of the UDHR relates to the right to "life, liberty and security of persons," and Article 5 relates to no one being subjected to "cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment." I would argue that the lockdowns and subsequent measures promoted, implemented and endorsed by the Commonwealth Government could be seen as having curtailed life, liberty and security, and as being cruel and inhumane. Measures regarding vaccine mandates would potentially also be in breach of Article 7 which states "All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination." Vaccine and masking mandates with punitive measures for failing to comply are by nature unlawful discriminatory. Also, Article 9 states, "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile." Arguably lockdowns and punitive restrictions on movement, any measures limiting in one's ability to move freely particularly in one's own country and town, are effectively in breach of this. How many people were put through the trauma of fines and arrests for leaving their homes – fines that subsequently could not be enforced when legally challenged. Lockdowns were effectively home detention. The term lockdown is a term used in relation to locking prisoners in their cells after all. Article 19 holds, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." As stated, silencing dissenting views is effectively in breach of this article.

<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

The Commonwealth Government may well be also **in breach of the Nuremberg Code-by actively promoting mandatory vaccination**. Vaccination is a medical intervention which should never be coerced and requires informed consent about all potential risks. Commonsense dictated that the COVID-19 vaccine developed in record time of 6 months (when it normally takes 10 years for development and testing of a vaccine) could well be described as untested and thus experimental, yet the Prime Minister delivered the coercive message in August 2020 that the new vaccine for COVID-19 would be "as mandatory as possible." He then very confusingly said a few months later, that Australia is a democracy, and no one can forced to take a medical intervention. Yet the "jab" as it was subsequently called, was made mandatory for many Australian workers to be able to continue in their work and profession. For instance, health workers who had acted courageously during the initial months of COVID-19 were subjected to a mandatory vaccine in order to continue their work. Considerable numbers subsequently resigned not wishing to take the experimental vaccine, or indeed have fallen ill and some died due to side effects of the vaccine.

New research available just today has shown the all-cause mortality figure in Australia during COVID-19 was 25,305, however after 62,673,028 injections were administered, the all-cause mortality

figure was 31,148 (sourced from Table 1 in the document referenced below). The peer reviewed study assessing the impact of the COVID-19 vaccine in the Southern Hemisphere found there was no reduction in all-cause mortality after the COVID-19 vaccinations were rolled out. The opposite occurred. In terms of decision making the Commonwealth Government could not have made a greater error.

[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jeremie-Mercier-2/publication/373989367\\_COVID-19\\_vaccine-associated\\_mortality\\_in\\_the\\_Southern\\_Hemisphere/links/650718f1ca19e8355c9a7467/COVID-19-vaccine-associated-mortality-in-the-Southern-Hemisphere.pdf?origin=publication\\_detail&tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uRG93bmV2aW91c1BhZ2UiOiJwdWJsaWNhdGlvbiJ9fQ](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jeremie-Mercier-2/publication/373989367_COVID-19_vaccine-associated_mortality_in_the_Southern_Hemisphere/links/650718f1ca19e8355c9a7467/COVID-19-vaccine-associated-mortality-in-the-Southern-Hemisphere.pdf?origin=publication_detail&tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uRG93bmV2aW91c1BhZ2UiOiJwdWJsaWNhdGlvbiJ9fQ)

While it might have been the State Governments and employers who enforced many of these mandates, it was the Commonwealth Government and Scott Morrison, the Prime Minister at the time, who introduced the term mandatory in relation to the vaccines and who have continued to promote the vaccines as the first line of defence against COVID-19 despite the mandates being a violation of human rights and despite there being emerging problems in relation to vaccine safety and efficacy.

<https://history.nih.gov/display/history/Nuremberg%2BCode>

In reference to the Commonwealth Government's initial governance response to the threat as it emerged in February-March 2020, the response was **fear based and disproportionate and as it has become apparent contributed to excess deaths**. What is needed in times of crisis is calm and sound leadership encouraging a willingness for individuals and groups of people to courageously keep working, to fight the good fight, to keep the wheels of industry turning, to keep the supply chains open, to continue to look after one another and the vulnerable. What we lived through instead was daily fear driven speeches by the Prime Minister and policies and initiatives that shut down the country creating feelings of hysteria in the population with the results that have now emerged.

**I would like to see a response** to any future threats of any kind **that encourages clear thinking, courage to keep working, that encourages rational decision making, open communication and debate, respects human rights and respects the lessons learned from history by adhering to the Nuremberg Code and UDHR**. At the end of the day, individuals within the Commonwealth Government are accountable for their actions even if others with the government and associated agencies were taking actions that were fear based or human rights violations. Nuremberg trials post WWII in Germany showed, saying I was following orders, or I was doing what I was told, were not considered a valid form of defence.

I would like to see a **thorough investigation** into decision making of the Commonwealth Government around all the COVID-19 measures. I would like to **compensation** provided for all Australians as we have all been impacted adversely one way or another by the decisions made by the Commonwealth Government. I would like to hear and read an **official statement of public apology** issued by the Commonwealth Government and State Governments for the suffering and harm imposed on the Australian people. I have heard it said, that Australia's heart is broken following due to the impact of the pandemic response by government at all levels. If we think about a relationship where one person has wronged another, acknowledgement of the suffering that has been caused is required. Acknowledgement of the unskilful action of the one who has done wrong is

also required. Forgiveness and healing can then follow and there is then the opportunity to rebuild trust and faith.

- **Key health response measures (for example across COVID-19 vaccinations and treatments, key medical supplies such as personal protective equipment, quarantine facilities, and public health messaging).**

See above.

- **Broader health supports for people impacted by COVID-19 and/or lockdowns (for example mental health and suicide prevention supports, and access to screening and other preventive health measures).**

Please read this in the context of the response above.

The Commonwealth Government by promoting and endorsing the lockdowns, masking, vaccines, and discrimination has indirect and, in some cases, direct responsibility for an immeasurable amount of **mental suffering, grief and loss** throughout this country. I know firsthand of a family whose son took his life as a result of the impact on his mental health seeing the COVID-19 measures as described above. At the tender age [REDACTED] he was subjected to lock down at home. The breakdown of relationship with his peers, isolation and onset of mental illness took its toll and he ended his life [REDACTED]. I heard similar stories of people taking their own lives during the extended lockdowns in Victoria. I have a family member who suffered [REDACTED] during the lockdowns in Victoria. He moved interstate to attempt to start over but, upon attempting to return to work in the hospitality industry, he was coerced into taking the jab by his employer. Whenever there was a COVID-19 case at work he had to be lockdown for a week as he was unvaccinated. Not able to cope with another week of lockdown and the ongoing discrimination he took the jab and then was diagnosed with COVID-19 after taking the jab (and of course required to go into another quarantine period). I believe it is well established that the lockdowns induced depression and subsequently increased drug and alcohol use as a coping mechanism. They also induced update of an untested vaccine that at we now have documented led to excess deaths.

While the Commonwealth Government may argue they are not directly responsible for the mental health, harm to individuals or the choices of individuals, nevertheless they do definitely have an indirect responsibility. It was the Commonwealth Government who drove up the fear initially about COVID-19 and continue to do so. It was the Commonwealth Government that introduced the first COVID-19 measures. The Commonwealth Government had the ability to take corrective measures and reduce government overreach once it became apparent that COVID-19 was not resulting in excess death as initial reports projected. Indeed, it is true that it was a "case pandemic." It has become clear the response of government on all levels in this country was disproportionate resulting in significant mental suffering including suicide and also deaths related to the injections themselves (see reference above). Every person I know can name someone who died or had a severe adverse reaction following taking the experimental COVID-19 vaccine. This leaves horrible scars in the minds of us left behind and loss of faith in our government bodies and peak bodies. **There needs to be an honest appraisal of the death toll attributable to all the anti-COVID-19 measures endorsed by the Commonwealth Government and other levels of Government for the body, mind and soul of this nation to heal.**

- Community supports (across early childhood education and care, higher education, housing and homelessness measures, family and domestic violence measures in areas of Commonwealth Government responsibility).

Please read this in the context of the responses above.

Up until October 2020 I was employed by an NGO as a Drug and Alcohol Counsellor. During February and March 2020 I was horrified at the messaging I was hearing from the Commonwealth Government and impact this had on my colleagues and the vulnerable families in our community. In response to the Commonwealth Government's fear messaging about COVID-19 the organisation I worked for adopted the most fear based responses to the emerging threat. **What I saw in my colleagues was that reasonable responses and compassion were replaced by self-interest for their own welfare with complete disregard for the welfare of clients and their families. This occurred as a direct result of people listening actively every day to the information coming from the Prime Minister and Commonwealth Government.** The motto of my workplace was "Exceptional care of the vulnerable." The response of the Commonwealth Government resulted in my employer cutting one of group programs completely with no follow up support for participants recovering from addiction. Our services were reduced to telephone consultations overnight. We were supporting about 50 families in the community through a drug and alcohol counselling service. Our face-to-face services were withdrawn at a time when people attempting to recover from mental health issues, domestic violence and addiction needed more support not less. As a result, I witnessed vulnerable women and children with complex needs left alone in the community unable to receive the support they needed. This left me personally feeling devastated as I was unable to provide the care that as a professional I wanted to provide. Family and Community Services continued to see families, but I as their counsellor, was not allowed to do so being considered part of a so called non-essential service. Many of the parents I was supporting were no longer able to see their children. Only time will tell the long-term impacts of this. The irony is, that I was a Drug and Alcohol Counsellor and not allowed to see my clients, however the liquor stores were open. What a disgraceful response by the leaders and governing bodies of our nation.

Yours sincerely

**Michelle Richards**

**B.A. Honours (Psychology)**

**Former AOD Counsellor as I was mandated out of the workforce by Government measures**