

Covid-19 Submission

I am writing to you on behalf of myself and my family affected by the Commonwealth and State Governments of Australia response to Covid-19. To this day, I feel distress and resentment over what transpired while repatriating my family from Canada to Australia. When I took my Australian Pledge of Citizenship in the 90's, abided by all my duties and responsibilities to Australia, including providing a public service and paying my taxes as a teacher in the Australian education system, I never would have imagined that as a citizen of Australia, my right 'to return freely to my country' would not apply. Instead, my family was required to be double vaccinated, police and military escorted and incarcerated upon our return home because my family could not mobilise quickly enough to make the window, before or after quarantine was in place, that other Australians did to avoid financial penalty, imprisonment and subsequent and ongoing harassment. Whatever happened to all Australians being equal under the law?

Prior to the human biosecurity emergency, Covid-19, being declared in March 2020, my family had begun the arduous task of wrapping up our lives in Canada after an 11 year assignment away from Australia. Our house was on the market, our new home search in Victoria had begun, adequate notice was being given to employers and our two children were finishing up their high school and university studies for the year. Our passports were updated and we began investigating the process for relocating our two beloved dogs. At this stage, expats were told to stay put, but with concern growing for my husband's elderly parents who were facing health challenges, we were acting swiftly to come home as soon as possible. This is not an easy task when you are packing up a life with commitments and responsibilities. We were not 'returning travellers' as described by the Australian government. We are citizens of Australia that needed to come home.

Fast forward one year later, when we were free to go, but now faced the almost impossible task of finding flights and being allowed back into Australia with the caps now in place. Our family, having sold our house, with our furniture on route to Australia in a sea container, had to move into a two bedroom basement suite. Four people and two large dogs, sleeping on the floor for 7 months, with no idea when we would be able to secure flights. Both my kids were forced to defer their university entrance dates. The uncertainty of the situation caused a great deal of stress for all of us. When we did find flights, they were booked and then cancelled. Trying to schedule our dogs for their tightly timed vaccines prior to travel was a nightmare. In the end, our family had to split up into groups, rush within 48 hrs to pack, get PCR tested, and get to the airport with the hope our flights would still be going. We had such little notice of our flights, we even had to sell our remaining vehicle and possessions with less than 24 hrs to spare. Our dogs, who were supposed to be on a flight 6 weeks after us, were not reunited with us until 6 months later. Their commute was supposed to be a 2 day transit, but due to flight caps for pets, turned into a 35 day disaster, with them having to be repeatedly vaccinated, separated, flown across Canada and back and then driven to Los Angeles for their final departure. Needless to say, our family and our dogs were traumatized by this experience and sobbing when picking them up from quarantine. Not the homecoming any of us expected. And it would still be another 8 months before we would finally be able to see our family in Western Australia.

It is unnerving to think about the police and military escort we received upon our arrival into Australia. Not at all the privilege of 'returning freely to my country' I was promised. As for our forced quarantine experience, having been double vaccinated and PCR tested just prior to our departure, how could we have been considered a reasonable Covid-19 risk to begin with? My husband and son, who arrived two weeks prior to my daughter and myself, didn't even have a window that could open in their room. No fresh air. My daughter and I had a constant barrage of construction noise just

outside ours. My family eats a plant-based, organic, healthy diet. This was not available for us. No proper exercise but a stationary bike hired at our cost. Two weeks of our freedom was stolen. We had a new house sitting empty waiting for us in Victoria where we could have quarantined together in the comfort of our own home and yard like so many other Australians, both those who were already in Australia and those who were granted special exceptions to moving freely in and out of Australia. Our detention was cruel and breached our human rights. And the sickest part of all, is we have been hounded to pay for it. Not even a prisoner pays for their incarceration.

After everything it took to repatriate to Australia, particularly overcoming the abandonment by our government and the Australian people, my family will never forget being treated like aliens during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is embarrassing and un-Australian how our country turned its back on overseas Australian citizens in a global emergency. Not only did this cause a significant amount of trauma and distress to our family, among thousands of others, but also resulted in a financial cost of over \$40K. In addition to this, the NSW State government continues to harass us for payment of their hotel quarantine bill.

In conclusion, consistent with Australia being a party to the International Covenant On Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), it is my family's belief that no Australian citizen should be arbitrarily deprived the right to re-enter their own country. The Covid-19 response was arbitrary, particularly given we represented such a negligible risk to public health. Whether you are a celebrity, sport team, politician, diplomat, traveller, or overseas citizen- every Australian, without penalty or prejudice, by right of being Australian, has the right to come home.