



Submission to Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee COVID-19 Royal Commission

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The Australian Institute for Progress exists to advance the discussion, development and implementation of public policy for Australia's future, from its base in Brisbane. The future does not look after itself.

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January 12, 2024

The Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Australian Institute for Progress is an Australian think tank based in Queensland that took an early interest in COVID -19 policy. We thank the committee for this opportunity to make a submission on the inquiry into a COVID-19 Royal Commission.

Should you have any queries you may contact me by email graham.young@aip.asn.au, or by phone 0411 104 801.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Graham Young', with a stylized flourish at the end.

GRAHAM YOUNG
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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Introduction

In the degree to which governments disrupted the normal working of society the COVID-19 pandemic has been the most serious pandemic Australia has ever faced. However, it was a disease far less deadly than the Spanish Flu, the only other pandemic close to it in social disruption, and questions must now be answered as to why these historically unprecedented measures were taken.

Any royal commission should be wide-ranging and enquire not only into how well Australia fared compared to other jurisdictions, but why each of the measures were taken and how effective they were and set out a path for the future based on the best evidence for how to deal with the next pandemic.

Australia had a pre-existing pandemic plan, but it was not adhered to. It was similar to the pandemic plan adopted by Sweden, which in turn was similar to the pandemic plan advocated by the World Health Organisation prior to the advent of COVID-19. Sweden adhered to its plan with markedly better outcomes over the medium-term than Australia.

One of Sweden's better outcomes compared to Australia is a superior performance on excess deaths, with the persistence of excess deaths here from causes other than COVID-19 well-after the peak of the first waves of COVID-19 phenomenon which desperately demands an explanation.

The following recommended terms of reference are intended to direct any potential royal commission to these and other relevant questions. In our view our COVID-19 health response was the greatest public health failure in the history of Australia.

Recommended terms of reference

That the parliament approve terms of reference along the following lines.

That a Commissioner be appointed to inquire into all matters concerning the Commonwealth government's policies and actions with respect to public health, economic and other matters concerning the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and following included, but not limited to:

- a) *matters pertaining to governance including but not limited to:*
 - (i) *the adequacy of pre-existing pandemic plans and their relationship to policy that was actually implemented during the pandemic, including any data or information which might exist to support or otherwise those policies;*
 - (ii) *the process by which licensing bodies approve medications, including vaccines, for use;*
 - (iii) *the appropriateness of using states of emergency in pandemic situations;*
 - (iv) *the appropriateness of the make-up of bodies charged with setting policies;*
 - (v) *the role of regulatory authorities, including but not limited to bodies tasked with approving drugs and regulating the medical professions.*
- b) *matters pertaining to the effects of the policies that were implemented including but not limited to:*
 - (i) *the effectiveness and costs and benefits of policies including lockdowns and vaccinations to the community and to the individual; and*
 - (ii) *the extent of vaccine injury and how it relates to other vaccines.*
- c) *matters pertaining to legal and ethical issues including, but not limited to:*

- (i) *Australia's responsibilities under international conventions, covenants and treaties with special reference to vaccine mandates imposed by governments and private corporations; and*
 - (ii) *the role of the Human Rights Commission.*
- d) *matters pertaining to the quality of the data available to decision makers and the public including, but not limited to:*
 - (i) *the adequacy of data and the form in which it is reported; and*
 - (ii) *transparency.*
- e) *Matters pertaining to government drug procurement for treatment of COVID-19 including, but not limited to:*
 - (i) *the types of drugs that were purchased;*
 - (ii) *the amounts of drugs that were purchased; and*
 - (iii) *the purchasing process, including the cost to the Commonwealth.*

Conclusion

Australia cannot repeat what it did to deal with COVID-19 – it would be financially ruinous, and the financial resources do not exist to repeat the exercise. A Royal Commission into our policies has the potential to ensure we do not repeat this error and develop a sustainable model for dealing with rare events like pandemics in the future.