

## Inquiry into the Government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic

Mr Samuel Dales

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### YOUR SUBMISSION

#### Submission:

The Victorian government's response to the coronavirus pandemic has had a huge effect on our family. The rules have been strict and draconian, and completely disproportionate with the risk. There has been little to no information provided on the advice that the government has received to impose these measures. We are only told that the information does exist and has been provided by health professionals. All the while, there is clear information coming to the surface that appears to directly contradict the actions of the Victorian government. The risk is simply not the same for everyone. Not once has this been acknowledged by the Victorian government, or an actual plan put in place to manage the differing risks across the community.

As per the information provided by BMJ Global Health (<https://gh.bmj.com/content/bmjgh/5/9/e003094.full.pdf>), the fatality rate for members of our family range between 0.0003% to 0.0098%. Whilst I am concerned by the by the virus and the side effects associated with it, I believe this to be an acceptable risk for us to continue living our lives within the community. We are happy to manage our own risk in relation to community transmission, by using common sense and a heightened degree of caution. I do not find the strict lockdown of an entire state for at least 8 months to be a proportionate or effective response to this risk. Whilst the risk is low for our family, I understand that the risk is inflated for those who are immuno-compromised, and that the risk increases the older that people are. However, since March of 2020, I am not aware of one single initiative or discussion in parliament, to effectively manage the risk of the vulnerable, whilst maintaining some level of decency for the rest of society. This issue should be at the forefront of every discussion. It has not even been mentioned.

At the start of the pandemic, we were told that the virus was extremely deadly and contagious. However, in November 2020, the Victorian Chief Health Officer, Brett Sutton, was quoted as saying:

“75% of all cases don't pass it onto anyone else, & about 30% of all cases drive transmission to all other close contacts.”

So on top of the fact that the risk is very low to my family, I'm now being told that  $\frac{3}{4}$  of cases are simply not contagious. This is in stark contrast to many of Mr. Sutton's previous comments. However, the government has not changed it's narrative at all. That is that coronavirus is the worst thing in the world that will kill everyone if we don't shut down everything indefinitely.

This is reinforced by a recent article in nature magazine (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-020-19802-w>), that clearly states "The citywide nucleic acid screening of SARS-CoV-2 infection in Wuhan recruited

nearly 10 million people, and found no newly confirmed cases with COVID-19. The detection rate of asymptomatic positive cases was very low, and there was no evidence of transmission from asymptomatic positive persons to traced close contacts. There were no asymptomatic positive cases in 96.4% of the residential communities."

"In the present study, virus culture was carried out on samples from asymptomatic positive cases, and found no viable SARS-CoV-2 virus. All close contacts of the asymptomatic positive cases tested negative, indicating that the asymptomatic positive cases detected in this study were unlikely to be infectious." The study involved 10 million participants and appears to confirm beyond the shadow of a doubt that the virus is nowhere near as contagious as we were originally told.

As of writing, there is not a single case in Victoria, yet the state of emergency is still in place. So, there is a state of emergency in place for a virus that kills 0.002% of the population, and is not contagious on in 75% of cases (96.4% according to nature magazine), and of which there is not one single active case in the entire state. It is simply mind boggling that this is being allowed to occur. I can only assume that the government wishes to hold onto the emergency declaration to extend it's power and influence over the lives of Victorian's as long as possible.

The numbers are difficult to trust as well, with the definition of a death from coronavirus being a patient that has tested positive to the virus within 30 days of death. We also need to consider underlying health issues. Why is this not a part of the discussion? I have never once heard this mentioned in the governments narrative. Not to mention that the integrity of the PCR test itself is under much scrutiny with a court in Portugal ruling the test unreliable (<https://off-guardian.org/2020/11/20/portuguese-court-rules-pcr-tests-unreliable-quarantines-unlawful/>). The government began using terms such as soft positive and false positive with little or no clarification as to what they actually meant. In Italy, there is I much discussion about these terms with the consumers association revealing that false positives are as high as 95%. This is staggering and casts a great amount of doubt on the information provided by the Victorian government.

The one and only solution provided by the Victorian government, was a strict lockdown of the entirety of our society. Lockdown's are inhumane and ineffective. At first, people went along with it. It was early days and little was known about the virus itself. Eight months in and it's curious as to why we engaged in a lockdown at all. The reasoning was from advice provided by health officials that the government have been in close consultation with. As to who these specialists are, and what they actually said, we'll never know because it's never been made public. However, in November, the effects of lockdown are being laid bare. They are absolutely devastating to communities. Suicide, self-harm and ED presentations are all up 30%. Psychological distress is up at least 40%. That is 2.7 million people that are currently in psychological distress in the state of Victoria. It is a mental health pandemic. I'm no mathematician but 2.7 million people sure is a much bigger number than the 900 that have died from coronavirus. You don't deal with one pandemic by creating another. We are a family of 4 with ages ranging from 1 to 37, and every single member of our family has struggled with their mental health as a result of the actions of the Victorian government. And I doubt that we would even be included in those statistics as we have never sought medical treatment for the issues that arose. So, in actual fact, the number is likely much, much higher than that. The government has again failed to protect the vulnerable here. Those with mental issues have been placed under extreme pressure here by further isolating and alienating them from the rest of the world, and the services that they rely on to survive. The government has claimed that they support mental health without ever really bringing it to the surface or acknowledging the severe stress that lockdown places these people in. I'm not sure which health officials advised these things but they should have their medical licenses revoked. Dealing with one health issue whilst abandoning the impacts of all others is not even close to an effective health response. If anything, it anti-health. It is the equivalent of taking up smoking to deal with an anxiety issue.

In general, restricting the movement of people is inhumane. I have heard of people unallowed to visit dying family members because of lockdown restrictions. How dare any government take that right away from someone. If someone is willing to take the risk in order to say goodbye to a loved one, it should absolutely

be their right. There is a time and place for the influence of government. This is not it. These things that have been taken from people, can never be returned. The hurt and suffering will always remain. The 5km rule was completely unnecessary. If the other rules imposed actually worked and were being followed (social distancing, wearing a mask), then it would simply not matter if an infected person were more than 5km's from their home. Restricting people's movements left them unable to visit loved ones during a time of already unimaginable stress. No other state required the implementation of such a restriction to manage the crisis. As an Australian, I pay taxes to utilise medical services anywhere within the entire country. It's my right. I'm not just paying for my local hospital; I'm funding the entire system. And as part of that system, I'm entitled to medical care anywhere in the entire country. But that was taken away from me with little to no reasoning. The overrun of hospitals and health systems all over the country simply never occurred. The closing of borders was an unconstitutional oversight, placing further stress on the Australian public. How there are any remaining border or travel restrictions in place is beyond me. Whilst temporary restrictions may have been necessary, they do not come close to be able to justify what has occurred.

Then there is the economic effect. It appears to be a war on small business and the middle class. As a Belgrave resident, before March 2020, I was privileged to live in a fantastic community, full of local businesses supporting the community. To see the majority of the main street closed for 8 months of the year was just devastating. So many businesses closed, and the rest appeared to struggle. Speaking recently to a business owner from our main st, he seemed to have completely given up. He commented that the commercial side of the business no longer made sense. As a result, unemployment has absolutely skyrocketed. The rate of unemployment in women is at an all-time high. Throughout the pandemic, entire industries have struggled for reasons unknown, held captive by the Victorian government and their ever-changing rules and regulations that change with little to no warning, or actual scientific reasoning. Our family has struggled also with only one parent maintaining an income. The lack of financial support and understanding, as well as a lack of reasoning by the Victorian government, has let small business and struggling families down during the pandemic.

The mandatory use of masks was another issue where little to no actual science or reasoning was provided. Again, we were told that this was best for our health, as detailed by health professionals and the science that they have access to. As of November 2020, I am still unaware of a single piece of science that recommends the use of masks in all environments, to effectively stop the spread of an infectious virus. I am more than happy to be proved wrong, but after scouring the internet, the only evidence I can find points to the contrary. The only science I can find on the matter states that masks provide a 0.3% risk reduction as the strongest argument for mask wearing to prevent COVID-19. This does not take into account the negative effects of mask wearing (increased ILI, bacterial pneumonia, psych issues etc.). The results of the study can be viewed here (<https://www.acpjournals.org/doi/10.7326/M20-6817>). So it seems to me that the science is VERY clear. Masks do not prevent the spread of this virus. Yet the government insisted that the data confirms that it does. It is not possible to confirm this when there are several other variables in play. To effectively prove that the masks are making a difference, you would need to remove social distancing and lockdown. If the cases went down without those two other restrictions, then I might agree that there's a clear correlation. The Victorian government has let the public down by strictly enforcing mandatory masks, when there is little to no science to back it up.

But the worst side effect of the masks is the way we're now treating each other in the street. I have a valid medical exemption for not wearing a mask, as per the guidelines on the DHHS website. Therefore, I am not required to wear a mask. However, I have encountered abuse, aggressive behaviour and discrimination within the community whilst not wearing a mask. My previously wonderful community of Belgrave has been thrown into disarray and panic by the fear mongering of a government desperate to appear in control. I now fear leaving the house with my children at the abuse I will receive for not wearing a mask, despite the fact that I am breaking none of the DHHS guidelines. The issue has placed fear and distrust of others within the community. We no longer feel safe and happy within our town. We ponder fleeing the state, and sometimes, the country out of fear of how our governments are responding in Australia.

The way that the rules are communicated also places people at an imposition. You need to have some kind of twitter feed hooked up directly to your brain in order to keep track of what now makes you a criminal. I would hate to be someone that is without internet. It would literally be impossible to keep up. They are also delivered with heartless demeanor and an overtone of it being our fault for not following the rules that we didn't know existed and were never communicated to us. No government should have the right to simply change laws and criminalise basic human activity at a moments notice. Yes, there has been a state of emergency and disaster, but that should not allow a government to do whatever it pleases. There has been zero community engagement on any of this. We are simply told what to think and that you're now a criminal if you go see your Mum 5 mins down the road. I would also like to point out that compassion and empathy are more important than ever during a state of disaster or emergency, and making everyone a criminal does not help anything. An example of this is the current rules surrounding mask wearing. The official advice from the premier was that you have to wear one if you're getting a sausage sizzle at bunnings, but not if you're outside. This is impossible to enforce and places further stress on communities trying to enforce each other (i.e. abuse for not following the rules). The rules need to be clear and well communicated. Not just dreamed up at a moments notice as you're heading into a press conference. The Victorian government has failed the people by it's poor communication and justification of the rules it has imposed.

The fines and penalties also are disproportionate with the offences. This is coupled with heavy-handed behavior from law enforcement. I experienced this first-hand when I attempted to peacefully protest lockdown on Melbourne Cup Day. Below is an account of my experience:

Upon arrival, people gathered and began the public discussion. After 10 minutes, Victoria Police made a circle around the protesters. At that time, there was plenty of space to allow the protest to continue, whilst also allowing attendees to follow social distancing protocols. Soon, Victoria Police began bringing the circle in closer, and closer. Any who stood their ground were violently dealt with by Victorian Police. I saw people pepper sprayed for standing their ground or attempting to leave the escalating situation. I watched as they writhed and convulsed in pain. I watched as Victorian Police denied their repeated requests for medical attention. They were clearly in distress. Police did not respond verbally to any requests for information. They only physically apprehended people if they attempted to move past them. I saw people having asthma and severe panic attacks, again initially refused medical attention, or any recognition of their distress from Police. I saw people on the verge of passing out from the heat and lack of water, begging police to be let out. The Police continued their wall of silence. Eventually, someone emerged, and removed a few of the distressed individuals. But that was just the beginning for us. By this stage, we were forced together in a tight space, completely unable to maintain anything that resembled social distancing. We had been forced together into a tight space, and police surrounded us with a wall of silence. I would compare it to a mosh pit at a music festival. We were held for 4 hours in 30-degree heat without access to water, toilets, or basic human decency. At no point did anyone from Victoria Police attempt to communicate what was occurring, or why we were being unlawfully detained. I do not believe animals would be treated this way. During one of their movements were they circled closer into us, one of the Police stated that they were not trying to intimidate us. It was impossible not to be intimidated. It was almost a 1 to 1 ratio of police to protesters. They were armed with riot gear, pepper spray and guns. Lots of guns. After around 3 hours, the police began circulating water to the protesters from a bucket. If they (or the politicians/police) who ordered this response really cared about the virus risk, is this how we would be treated? I had expected/hoped the protest to go for an hour at the most. It was a rush for me to get there on time and I did not have time to eat before the protest. Around 4pm, after 4 hours in the hot sun, denied of water of toilets, or any form of communication as to why I was being detained, I was told I was being arrested. 2 police officers grabbed me and escorted me a few steps before saying that I was only being cautioned. I was thoroughly confused, but again, kept silent. I was then taken to another group of officers where I was processed. I was told that I was being fined for breaching the chief health officer's directive (this is not a law by the way) of not maintaining a 1.5m social distance, the very thing we had been forced to break by the police themselves.

The dramatic and heavy-handed actions of police have left a scar on me. An intense nervousness rises in my stomach whenever I see a police officer, concerned that I will again be treated with contempt for not following a new directive from the chief health officer this morning. The role of Police is supposed to be one of protection, not intimidation. It has also left a scar on my family. My partner was left terrified as I messaged her from the escalating situation. She was unsure if I'd be able to return home to my family that day, for having the courage to speak up. Daniel Andrews claims he endorses the right to protest. The actions of law enforcement that day were a far cry from a democracy that endorses the right to protest. They were one of a tyrannical government, desperate to make an example of those who dared to question them. This is laid bare by the opposing treatment of the Black Lives Matter protest in June, and the climate change protest in November. For my part in the protest, I was fine \$1652. Not a single case of coronavirus arose from the protest, nor the despicable actions of police that day.

In a democracy, there is an unwritten agreement between the government and it's people. We will work, pay taxes, contribute to our society and community, and in exchange, the government will provide infrastructure, a safe environment for families to be raised in amidst the values that represent the will of the people. I feel that agreement has been broken by the Victorian government during this pandemic. I no longer feel safe or happy in this state. I fear my government and law enforcement. I reject the social contract that they are proposing and I expect the right to question it as I see fit, as is the spirit of the Australian constitution. The government want to be able to act however they please during a state of disaster or emergency. As demonstrated by the Andrews government, this is not safe for the general public of Victoria. They have failed the citizens of Victoria by allowing the response to the emergency, to be worse than the emergency itself.

**Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?:**

Please end this madness.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**Signature:**

Samuel Dales