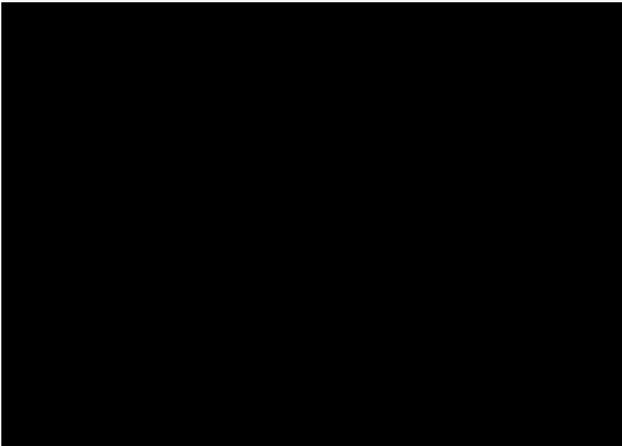


## Inquiry into the Government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic

Mr Benjamin Cronshaw



### YOUR SUBMISSION

#### **Submission:**

I appreciate the work of this Inquiry into examining what has been a tremendous public health challenge and the government response. There may have been some areas in which the Victorian government could have done better. This is worth examining, primarily so we can better understand how best to manage a pandemic situation in the future should it occur again. Nonetheless, I want to commend the Victorian government for their action and keeping Victorians safe. The cooperation between the State and Commonwealth government is commendable and appreciated. I also thank public health officials and frontline and support workers who were working very hard during the crisis.

It has been good to see our leaders make decisions based on the expert medical and scientific advice, with a strong emphasis placed on public health and protecting vulnerable members of the population. The stay at home restrictions (Stage 3) made sense. They were important and proportionate restrictions to manage the threat of the virus. The main aim was flattening the curve and preventing our hospital system was being overrun, which through Australian government and community effort we have done so effectively. As I am writing in mid-May there is a moderate amount of cases occurring in Victoria (~10-20 per day), including from several outbreaks. I am confident that the situation is under control, though we need to remain vigilant and maintain social distancing and other measures. Testing and contact tracing are important measures to contain the spread of the virus, which I am pleased to see the government has emphasised. The government advertising has also been an effective measure in making people aware of the threat of the coronavirus and detailing reasons to leave home. It is also good to see there has been attention to family violence and mental health with advertisements and other funding, given the stress that is likely to come from the pandemic and restrictions.

There is a balancing act between competing health and economic priorities, including being confined at home or indoors can be stressful and negatively impact on people's mental health. I can appreciate that the restrictions have been stressful for many people, including people experiencing financial difficulty from losing work or business. It is important to realise that the restrictions would not impact the same for everyone e.g. you can continue to play tennis or go for a swim if you have a private tennis court or swimming pool, but not if you live in an apartment and relied on public facilities (or a beach) that were closed down.

I am a university student undertaking my 4th honours year at the University of Melbourne. Initially there were restrictions on social activities, such as club and society gatherings. Then as university was closed we needed to undertake all our classes online via Zoom and other applications. My study was able to continue

without any negative impacts. I was happy to study and do my university work from home, and doing classes online. I am fortunate to have a stable and enjoyable family environment, along with a spacious garden. I have actually enjoyed taking more time at home to relax, spend some time on hobbies and with family. I can only speak for myself, but I have been happy to do my part in slowing the spread of the virus by staying at home.

There are no easy answers to this crisis. The question of whether to open the schools is one tough issue. Closing them down to prevent community spread (mainly between parents and teachers) makes sense as a public health measure. Though it is also critical that we support children through this time and open them as soon as we can. I am pleased to see there are plans to progressively and cautiously open schools again in the coming weeks. We may gain some insights in post-pandemic analysis in hindsight in whether one path was a better course of action (including comparing different jurisdictions), but then again some things may simply be a judgement call. Honestly, I have been happy to defer to the wisdom of the Premier and think the government has done good work so far, including cooperation with the other state and federal governments.

This is a good time for society and government to think about what we want Victoria and Australia to be like post-pandemic. Many of us are taking some time to slow down our lives and reflect. We are realising the things that are important to us in life, such as our family and friends, connections with neighbours, going for a walk, having time for hobbies or education our children. Governments and communities are doing things that they had not done before, or to the same extent. Think of working from home, or increased government funding for childcare and unemployment benefits. We could also think of the low-emissions future as we attempt to mitigate dangerous climate change. Obviously we cannot reduce our emissions simply by going into a recession, as many people are struggling financially right now. We need structural change to ensure that we have high living standards and reducing our emissions and impact on the environment. Investing in renewable energy and other decarbonisation projects would be a great way of promoting employment and innovation as we build the Victorian recovery.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Kind Regards,

Benjamin Cronshaw.

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

Thanks for your work.

It is worth also looking at the recovery and ideas for post-pandemic society. How we can take what we have learned and experienced during the pandemic, and build on them. We cannot and should not go back to the way things were uncritically, but think imaginatively.

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Benjamin Cronshaw