

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE PUBLIC HEARING INTO THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO CORONAVIRUS

ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL REOPENINGS

I am a teacher in a State School. I have been concerned about the lack of consistency by Government leaders, including the Prime Minister. Less than a week ago, I saw a broadcast in which Mr Morrison stated that he wanted all students back at School. I discovered that Mr Morrison had later stated that his children would not be going back to School. There could many reasons for that decision, and I support parents who take responsibility for that decision. However, Mr Morrison's earlier statement does not reflect potential parental responsibility in making the decision to withhold their children from School, for legitimate reasons, including health concerns.

This is only one example of the mixed messages that our politicians are putting out on electronic media for public consumption and that have caused confusion in the minds of that some public.

I work in a Primary School. A colleague, who is a School Leader in a Secondary School, recently described Primary Schools as resembling "a petri dish" when it came to the incubation, transmission and re-emergence of viral illnesses. From my personal experience, I find some sympathy for his description.

I believe that all teachers would probably support a full return to School, under reasonable conditions which support the safety of all students and staff:

- putting in place arrangements to allow staff and student to regularly clean their hands; ***[Not currently available due to shortages.]***
- providing access to procurement services for those schools having difficulty in obtaining hygiene products; ***[Still not currently available due to shortages.]***
- implementing social distancing protocols in classrooms, including limiting numbers of students in accordance with the size of the learning space; ***[around 6 students per room, based on regular classroom sizes]***
- implementing restrictions to ensure that students and families do not congregate in areas around the school; ***[Not enforceable.]***
- requiring visitors to the school to maintain a social distance of 1.5 meters from each other; ***[Not enforceable.]***
- unwell students and/or staff members must remain or return home; ***[Parents send students to School when they are unwell. Not enforceable.]***
- avoiding the sharing of small office spaces and adhering to social distancing of at least 1.5 metres in staff rooms and other small spaces; ***[Possible.]***
- meetings involving school staff should be held via telephone or online (NB: the use of the word "should" establishes an expectation that meetings held by other means can only occur where there are exceptional circumstances, or the use of telephone or online methods are not available); ***[Current.]*** and
- that school cleaning should prioritise those areas in use by students and staff, with extra attention to high touch point surfaces. ***[Current.]***

CONTACT TRACING APP

With regard to the proposed Contact Tracing App, I agree with the use of such an App, IN PRINCIPLE, and FROM A MEDICAL PERSPECTIVE.

I have concerns with use of such an App, IN PRINCIPLE, and FROM A PRIVACY PERSPECTIVE.

I have not heard a sufficient explanation regarding the extent of information from the App, and how it works, to form an opinion regarding the use of such an App, IN PRACTICE.

My son, who is an IT Tech, has suggested that the proposed App will not provide what is needed, as it is asking for the wrong information.

THE GOVERNMENT'S PATH OUT OF THIS PANDEMIC

I believe that the Government was acting CONSERVATIVELY with regards the balancing of the ECONOMY with public safety. Fortunately, apart from those who have suffered or died as the result of contact cross-infection, the delay in imposing more stringent lockdown measures has not been of great harm to the Australian community.

However, I have been hearing our political leaders speaking publicly about the easing of the restrictions that have been in place and produced successful results.

My reading of the scientific literature surrounding pandemics generally, and COVID-19 specifically, are in agreement.

Our leaders, and our communities, should act CONSERVATIVELY with regards to the easing of restrictions.

This scientific literature indicates that, UNTIL MUCH WIDER COMMUNITY TESTING HAS TAKEN PLACE, we cannot know how widespread the infection is, within our communities.

Many people are carriers without showing symptoms [including children]. Other people have mild symptoms, have not been tested and are capable of infecting others.

The ABSENCE OF EVIDENCE of the level of infection within the community has been assisted by the isolation, within which many people have been living their lives.

The scientific literature has been saying that, once that isolation is removed, the potential for infection increases and will cause a second wave of infection within the community, which will be more difficult to contain without a complete take-up of Contact Tracing Apps. The scientific community should be heeded, despite the pain.

Before our communities, and our country, move out of current restrictions, our leaders need to make decisions based on scientific testing of a wider segment of Australia's population, establishment of a contact app and the availability of effective vaccines.