



Australia's Covid-19 Pandemic Response Failed Us

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“Australia must now urgently take stock of the criminalisation of everyday life, the enormous expense, and the future health, education and societal impacts of COVID lockdowns and restrictions,” said Scott Hargreaves, Executive Director of the Institute of Public Affairs.

Today, the IPA launched two ground-breaking research papers on the impact of Australia's failed response to the COVID-19 pandemic written by Professor Mirko Bagaric and Morgan Begg, Director of the IPA's Legal Rights Program.

The IPA report, *Hard lessons: Reckoning the Economic, Social, and Humanitarian costs of Zero-Covid* found;

- **The direct economic, fiscal and inflationary cost of pandemic measures stand at \$938.4 billion as at the end of the 2021-22 financial year.**

- **Students have suffered significant setbacks, particularly in Victoria where Year 9 students reading and numeracy skills have fallen behind by 12 weeks and 17 weeks, respectively.**
- **The costs of joblessness and not working on life expectancy as a result for the first nationwide lockdowns in March and April 2020 were 31 times greater than the maximum possible benefits of all lockdowns.**

“There are numerous socio-economic, recreational, lifestyle, and mental health harms caused as a consequence of lockdown measures which have not yet been fully quantified but will be a significant ongoing cost of Australia’s pandemic response,” said Morgan Begg.

The second report *The Crime of Criminalising Everyday Life: The Rule of Law Discarded in Victoria’s COVID Response*, found;

- **More than 50,000 normally law-abiding Victorians were subject to criminal sanctions for breaches of COVID restrictions.**
- **The criminalisation of the public health response was unworkable as most fines remain unpaid today.**

“Imposing criminal sanctions on Victorians for sitting in public places, being out after dark and congregating with more than two people is the greatest overuse of the criminal law in a democracy in recent history,” Professor Mirko Bagaric said.

“The criminal law is society’s harshest form of condemnation and its strongest instrument of coercion. It must only be used as a last resort for serious wrongdoing. Yet the Victorian Government employed it as the main instrument to force compliance with the strictest COVID lockdown in the world.”

“All fines should be cancelled, Victorians should be reimbursed for payments made and laws be reformed to ensure a bureaucrat can no longer unilaterally regulate basic human activity under threat of criminal sanction,” Professor Bagaric said.

Scott Hargreaves has again called for an end to all mandates and a comprehensive Royal Commission into the response of governments at all levels throughout the pandemic.

“Every Australian deserves a full and complete account of what went on during the pandemic. We need a joint Royal Commission including the Commonwealth and State Governments to shed light on what went on behind closed doors and a commitment from all political participants that this never happens again.”

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