



Plan On Living And Dying With The Virus

Publish Date:

July 2021

On Wednesday, NSW Deputy Premier [John Barilaro](#) spoke more honestly about COVID-19 than any other politician – state or federal – has done since the outbreak of the virus in Australia in January last year.

He said he didn't know what would happen if infections in Sydney did not fall before the planned end of the state's lockdown on August 28, and he had "no crystal ball to tell you what we do next".

That's quite different from the usual approach of most politicians, which is to claim they "have a plan" for anything and everything.

For the past 18 months, Australians have been told about plan after plan to manage the virus, and 99 per cent of them have followed the plans and done what they were told – no matter how unthinkable such government diktats might have been a year ago – and now Barilaro admits what so many people have suspected all along.



To use his phrase from Wednesday, the [Berejiklian government](#) has “no playbook” to get Sydney out of the lockdown.

In Victoria, the Andrews government has no plan for managing COVID-19 other than lockdowns. Melbourne has had five of them, and no Victorian would be foolish enough to believe there won't be more before the year is over.

And Victorians have long stopped attempting to make sense of the rules they are now expected to live under. They're allowed to visit a brothel, but not their mother. According to the Victorian government the difference is that you can sign in to a brothel with a QR code, but you can't when you go around to your parents' home.

Lockdowns are no more a plan for dealing with COVID-19 than a hammer is a plan for fixing a hole in the roof.

Leaving aside the not altogether pleasant implications of the government requiring people to register to visit private residences, it shouldn't be beyond the capacity of the Victorian public service (whose salaries and superannuation costs are projected to increase by 10 per cent next year) to design a system that accommodates the needs of Victorians who wish to both visit brothels and see their parents.

Meanwhile, the federal government's plans, such as they are, appear to change by the week. At the beginning of the month [the Prime Minister announced a “four-phase plan”](#), including lockdowns as “a last resort”. Yesterday he retreated, saying lockdowns might be enforced into next year.

Lockdowns are no more a plan for dealing with COVID-19 than a hammer is a plan for fixing a hole in the roof. Lockdowns and hammers are tools, not plans.

Vaccination is also only a tool to manage COVID-19. A plan would involve the federal and state governments telling Australians what will happen when a desired percentage of the population is vaccinated. No such plan is in sight.

Any plan for COVID-19 will eventually require the country's leaders to make clear to the public what many of them have acknowledged in private but have been afraid to say out loud.

Even after every Australian who wants the vaccine (of whatever brand) has had the opportunity to receive it, COVID-19 (or its variants) will continue to exist in the community, and even the vaccinated might become infected and might die from it.

A wicked policy problem

That statement is both clear and at the same time wicked. It's not “wicked” in the sense that it's



immoral or wrong. Rather it's the archetypal "wicked policy problem", defined as a problem that is difficult because the issue is complex and value-laden, and because "the solution" involves a very different approach from what has gone before.

When Virgin Australia chief executive Jayne Hrdlicka [called for the reopening of international borders](#) even if "some people die", Scott Morrison responded by saying she had been "somewhat insensitive". The Prime Minister said, "I find it very difficult to have any truck of what was said there."

Perhaps Hrdlicka could have expressed herself differently, and perhaps she should have made the broader point that basically any return to "normality" of whatever kind will, tragically, involve some people dying – as the community readily accepted before the appearance of COVID-19.

But if the attitude expressed by the Prime Minister is going to continue to be the basis of the federal government's policy to manage COVID-19, Australia and Australians are going to be locked down and locked away for a very long time.

Original Link:

<https://www.afr.com/policy/economy/plan-on-living-and-dying-with-the-virus-20210728-p58dk6>

Originally published in:

The Australian Financial Review