



Putting A Price On The Cost Of Covid Lockdowns

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We are not – and have never been – ‘in this together’.

As thousands of Australians lined up outside Centrelink in March last year, the politicians and bureaucrats responsible watched from their taxpayer-funded offices.

For public servants, professionals and the independently wealthy, lockdowns have been at worst an inconvenience. For small business owners and those employed by them, they have been existential.

So it is little wonder that, nearly eighteen months after ‘two weeks to flatten the curve’, the community is deeply divided on whether we should persist with lockdowns.

The Institute of Public Affairs this week [released new polling](#) on Sydney’s lockdown. It shows the extent of this divide in NSW, home to Australia’s second-longest lockdown after Victoria’s monster last year.



The research suggests that people in NSW are fairly evenly split on the worth of lockdowns. Forty-one per cent agree the economic and social costs of lockdowns are greater than the risk of Covid. Slightly fewer disagree at 36 per cent, with 23 per cent neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

So barely more than a third of us think Covid zero is worth the pain.

Analysis of data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that more than 10,000 jobs per day were lost in the first three weeks of the Sydney lockdown alone. That is equal to all the jobs created in NSW across the 2020-21 financial year.

What took an entire year in lockdown-free NSW was destroyed in just a few weeks, showing it is naive to expect the economy to simply 'bounce back'. With lockdowns, jobs go up the stairs but come down the escalator.

ABS data also shows lockdowns favour some jobs over others. More than half a million jobs among the bottom fifth of income workers disappeared between March and November last year, while the top fifth saw jobs increase by nearly 200,000.

The burden of Australia's elimination strategy is borne overwhelmingly by the most disadvantaged.

Similarly, the cost of lockdowns falls disproportionately on younger Australians. Between March and November last year, employment among Australians aged between 15 and 34 fell by 158,000, while jobs increased for those over 35.

But this is not, as lockdown enthusiasts would have you believe, just about money, or even just about the economy. The damage to our country, our society and our way of life is significant, and it's getting worse.

A recent survey by the Journal of Psychiatric Research shows almost one in ten respondents were contemplating suicide in September last year.

And worst of all, it is increasingly clear that very little of what our governments are doing is actually working. Lockdowns have always been at best a blunt instrument, but experience is proving that they are basically useless against newer, more infectious strains of the virus.

Whatever we're trying to achieve with this Covid zero strategy, only a minority of the community believes that the pain, loss and anguish is worth it anymore. It's time for our politicians to stop outsourcing their decisions to the musings of health bureaucrats and start listening to the people they theoretically represent.

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