

Media Release

COVID Response is Causing a New Health Crisis

- Victorian Doctors plea for an immediate end to harmful restrictions
- No medical justification for ongoing shutdown
- Corona risk is manageable: a new, targeted approach is critical
- Evidence is growing of a major new public health crisis

October 2nd 2020, MELBOURNE: A group representing more than 500 Victorian doctors and medical experts have called on Premier Daniel Andrews to bring an immediate end to lockdown restrictions in Victoria, raising concerns over the alarming and growing human toll caused by Victoria's COVID-19 response.

The Covid Medical Network says that the current restrictions are unnecessary, disproportionate and must be lifted, in a statement posted to their website today.

The response to the virus will cause more deaths and result in far more negative health effects than the virus itself, it says.

"The Victorian Government is doing more harm than good," said Anaesthetist Dr. Eamonn Mathieson, speaking on behalf of the group.

"The ongoing physical, psychological, social and economic harm is creating a new health crisis that far outweighs any possible benefits from continuing the lockdown" said Dr. Mathieson.

Dr. David Marsh, a leading GP specialising in mental health, is alarmed at the rise in the number of people seeking help, many for the first time.

"We are experiencing a tsunami of mental health concerns, across all age groups. This cannot go on," he said.

Camberwell GP Dr. Stacey Harris fears that children are the overlooked victims of the flawed virus response. "I see 15 children and adolescents every day, and 40-50% of these have some form of depression, anxiety, eating restrictive behaviours and obsessive-compulsive behaviours that is newly diagnosed or exacerbated from the lockdown," she said

"Their social isolation in continuous lockdown is causing instrumental harm and damage, that is causing -and will continue to cause -a huge mental health burden in Melbourne."

Recent studies show that GP visits as well as screening checks for diabetes and common cancers have plummeted in recent months due to COVID-related concerns.

Breast cancer surgeon Dr. Jane O'Brien is concerned that the number of breast cancer presentations has plummeted during lockdown.

She said "I have seen new breast cancer diagnoses from June to September down by 70% on both 2018 and 2019. Delayed diagnosis means we will see more women dying in coming years – from cancers which could have been potentially cured if we had seen them earlier."

Dr. Mathieson urged the Government to consider the broader data around all health impacts, rather than the single-issue focus on COVID-19.

Media Release

“The time has come to step back and look at the bigger picture. The data does not support the actions being taken” he said.

“We have avoided a major COVID outbreak in Australia -now we need to limit the collateral damage. It’s time for a new approach.”

Dr. Mathieson questioned the shift in political rhetoric from “suppression” to “elimination” of the virus.

“There is no justification for causing widespread pain and suffering in the name of “viral elimination”. We can- and must - learn to live with it,” he said.

“The rules need to be based on science and the best evidence and data available -but looking at ALL the data - not just a narrow and limited section of the available statistics.”

The Covid Medical Network is calling on the Government to urgently establish a Committee of medical experts to inform decision making – comprising specialists in Mental Health, Geriatric, Psychiatric, Paediatrics, General Practice etc, as well as a broad interdisciplinary group including community leaders.

“It is essential the Government takes a broader view of the health and socio-economic picture,” said Dr. Mathieson.

“We need a new approach and a better plan - it is absolutely possible to reduce the risk of Coronavirus without causing the level of harm we are witnessing,” he said.

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For further information visit: www.covidmedicalnetwork.com

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Background

The Covid Medical Network

The Covid Medical Network is a group of senior practising doctors, nurses and other medical professionals who are alarmed by the harmful effects that the current lockdown restrictions are having on the people of Victoria. In June this year, they sent a letter to Premier Daniel Andrews outlining their concerns and urgently calling for major changes to the pandemic response – receiving over 500 signatures in support. A new statement has been posted this week outlining their ongoing and escalating concerns.

Dr. Eamonn Mathieson

Dr. Mathieson is a Specialist Anaesthetist, working in both public and private practice.

Dr Mathieson is a member of the Medico Legal Society of Victoria and has a special interest in Bioethics. He was also the convenor of the 'Doctors Conscience' group in 2008 which continues to lobby for the restoration of freedom of conscience for all Victorian healthcare workers.

Dr. Mathieson can be contacted at admin@covidmedicalnetwork.com

Dr. David Marsh is a visiting medical officer at Epworth Hospital Camberwell and a longstanding practicing G.P. in Richmond. He is a huge advocate for men's health, especially the mental health of young sportsmen. Dr. Marsh received a Medal of the Order of Australia alongside his wife, Clair, for services to the 2002 Bali terrorist bombing victims, was named Herald Sun Victorian of the Year and has become a Life Ambassador for the Australia Day Committee of Victoria

Dr. Stacey Harris is a GP in a large practice in Camberwell. She recently wrote an impassioned plea to Daniel Andrews warning him that the city's lockdown was causing a devastating wave of mental "anguish, despair and suicidal" thoughts among children says he is not easing restrictions fast enough, even as case numbers fall. (*The Australian*, October 2 2020, pg 1)

Dr. Jane O'Brien is a specialist breast cancer and oncoplastic surgeon who specialises in surgery for breast cancer and prophylactic/preventive surgery for high risk individuals. A detailed explanation of the significant impacts of the pandemic response on breast cancer and other cancer can be found on her website.

<http://www.melbournebreastcancersurgery.com.au/cancer-the-forgotten-c-of-the-pandemic/>