

I am a semi-retired accountant with over 40 years employment in various capacities including semi-government and private sector salaried positions, plus operating a number of my own or family small businesses.

In my semi-retired situation, I was employed in a food service warehouse for a number of years prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic policy responses. My private-sector employer was happy with my job performance and my annual reviews regularly recognised my value to them in the tasks I was required to perform.

During the Covid-19 period, I complied under protest with the progressively more onerous requirements of the Victorian government orders from the Chief Medical Officer and Minister for Health, including lockdowns, curfews, employment exemption certificates and mask wearing. I obtained an occupational safety exemption as a wearer of spectacles, because mask-wearing had the effect of fogging up my glasses in the work environment.

Throughout the period, I continued to be personally responsible for maintaining my health and remained free of Covid (in fact of any cold or 'flu or any symptoms thereof). Whenever I was tested, the results were negative. I concluded that my medical state did not require me to be vaccinated and I lodged a privacy notice with the Immunisation Register to ensure that my medical status was not to be released.

Eventually (October 2021) the government Orders removed the occupational safety exemption and imposed a "vaccination mandate" upon my employer such that I had to choose between remaining employed without being injected (and causing my employer to incur onerous fines) or contradicting my conscience and proceeding to receive the mRNA injections – unnecessarily.

Since I did not wish to place my employer in such an untenable financial position, I (along with a number of others) withdrew from work until such time as the mandates were to be lifted. Neither my employer nor I had any idea that this would result in a whole year of unemployment.

Following the State election, which included suspension of some of the mandates, and eventually the suspension of all except those applying to the health sector, I resumed employment 53 weeks after having to withdraw. This required that I re-apply for employment, and be assessed as if I had never been engaged previously.

The personal impact has been moderate as I was able to continue remotely in various voluntary roles, with some restrictions, but the financial impact has been considerable. As recent evidence has finally emerged, I am relieved that my reservations about the injections and my taking personal responsibility for my own health have been vindicated.

However, the entire Covid period has confirmed many of my reservations about centrally-imposed mass medicine and particularly the shift away from personal responsibility towards government imposition.

I would therefore urge the Committee to

- a) ensure that the exemption subject of this enquiry for prevention of discrimination on the basis of vaccination status be strongly approved as an interim measure and
- b) recommend in the longer term the removal of any and all legislation which works towards such centralised, government-imposed mandates.