

Covid response can't be left to doctors alone

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“Governments have a responsibility to consider all of the vulnerable.”

Covid is not a public “health” emergency. Rather, it’s a plain old public emergency.

This distinction matters. In a public emergency, all-of-government is brought to bear on a problem. But, by allowing the pandemic to be seen as a “health” emergency, Canadians have by default accepted public health officials as the only authority on Covid and allowed governments to make Covid their only priority, without considering whether anti-Covid laws and policies may be doing more harm than good.

As a result, no Canadian is now immune from:

- Lockdowns
- Arbitrary travel restrictions
- Closure of schools, gyms and houses of worship
- Enforced isolation and loneliness
- Closure of businesses deemed “non-essential” by politicians and a small number of doctors

Of course protecting the health of Canadians is important. But the measure of government success must be more than minimizing the death toll from a disease that has a 99.6% recovery rate and is most dangerous to only one demographic – the very old and the very ill – for which tailored protective measures are possible. If this is accomplished only by pushing

millions of Canadians into unemployment, financial distress and despair, it is not a success: It is a disaster.

Yet, Canada’s Covid response last year forced tens of thousands of businesses to close for good. By year end, 1.9 million Canadians were jobless, and Canada had an unemployment rate of 9.4%, up four percent from 2019.

For millions of unemployed Canadians, that’s a disaster. Then in January 2021, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business reported between 71,000 and 180,000 more businesses would close in 2021, ‘depending on how the situation evolves,’ placing one million to three million jobs at risk.

Another million personal disasters then, and a further cost added to the hundreds of billions of dollars the taxpayer has already borrowed.

There are other costs. Governments publish daily how many Canadians died with Covid – despite their lockdowns and restrictions. But, they have no idea how many people died because of their Covid measures – from cancelled or delayed surgery and diagnosis, rising deaths from drug overdoses or how many individuals were driven by despair to suicide.

Medical advice is not enough to serve as the sole basis for shaping public policy. David Redman, former head of Alberta’s Emergency Management Agency said, “putting doctors in charge was the wrong approach.”

He is right. Experts should be on tap, not on top.

Yes, the vulnerable need protection from Covid. At the same time, governments have a responsibility to all the vulnerable, to protect them from all manner of harm. The present approach cannot be sustained through continued massive interference with both Canadians’ Charter freedoms and their economic wellbeing. Eventually the money runs out. As Redman succinctly observed, we ‘don’t have 400 billion more dollars to tell healthy people to lock themselves in their houses and not go to work.’

More than medical health is at stake. It is Canada’s future. And that is a public emergency.

For more information, see the Justice Centre Report: Flying Blind: Governments’ hasty decisions to lock down Canadians while damaging public health and the economy
<https://www.jccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020-12-03-Flying-Blind.pdf>