Personal submission on the exposure draft bill:

Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023

Submission author: Ellen Gant

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Introduction

I am writing to express my extreme concerns regarding the draft misinformation and disinformation bill.

I am a [redacted] year old female who experienced a severe adverse reaction to the Pfizer Comirnaty COVID-19 vaccine on 31st May 2021. On that date, my life suddenly became coded as 'disinformation' by Australian government and social media policies, and I still live with the dire consequences of the censorship of my medically confirmed vaccine-induced illnesses to this day. I have been diagnosed with Chronic Spontaneous Urticaria and an allergy to polyethylene glycol (PEG) which is an excipient of the Pfizer Comirnaty vaccination.

I am fully aware that misinformation and disinformation, broadly speaking, and in very particular instances can have negative consequences for the community, and therefore I do understand some of the well-meaning sentiments with which this legislation has been written.

However, I am also well aware that the current practices of censorship are quite literally disabling, indebting and abandoning my fellow Australians. Over the last two years, censorship carried out by the media, educational institutions, social media and digital platforms in response to government Covid policies have already caused me extreme and ongoing harm as I attempt to obtain proper compensation, medical information and care, treatment, and peer support as a vaccine-injured Australian.

Due to the censorship of emerging peer-reviewed scientific research and legitimate investigative journalism on Covid vaccine harms, I have been prevented from finding medical help and treatment. Furthermore, false claims provided to me by the Government and medical community (for example that our reactions are 'self-limiting') have hindered proactive action by treating physicians, and have been therefore damaging to public health.

Perhaps most alarmingly, in the context of receiving such limited assistance from the Australian government and medical establishments, I have even been prevented from sharing my personal story, and from gaining mental and peer support from my social networks, because of social media censorship, again under the spurious claim that my personal story would be damaging to public health.

The increase of, and normalisation of these powers, and the provision of additional reserve powers, will not protect me and other vaccine-injured Australians from harm, as the bill is intended. It will instead increase our vulnerability and harm our health, which is in direct contradiction to the purpose of the bill.

Initial Injury

When I initially reacted to my Pfizer vaccination, despite Australia's rollout lagging behind the rest of the world, and thus ought to have been able to access experiences and data from elsewhere, it was shocking to find a total lack of information on government and public health websites, web searches, and social media on what to do if you had a serious reaction, or what the array of symptoms being experienced could be.

Eventually my symptoms were so severe, that my GP fast tracked my referral to an Immunologist. However, the prescribed treatment by the Immunologist, failed to provide any improvements in my health at all. Desperate in my need for help, I was fortunate to source help from “natural remedies” through the care and concern of an Integrative Practitioner who was willing and able to attempt to help me.

This significant and traumatic delay in accessing useful information about a life-changing set of very serious symptoms meant a delay also in finding appropriate medical treatment, which further delayed the commencement of treatment which could have led to a better outcome for me in regards to long-term harms and disablement I have experienced. The treatment options and appointments have been extremely costly and with no government support, I have taken on significant financial loss.

Uninformed medical staff

When medical treatment was sought, due to the censorship of any public discussion of Covid vaccine adverse reactions, medical staff had no access to meaningful guidelines about my illness and were unaware of how to identify my symptoms as a Covid vaccine injury. In rare situations where they were able to recognise my vaccine reaction as a serious issue, they did not know how to effectively treat me due to a lack of information accessible to them.

Recently, in June 2023, I have continued to encounter issues with the Immunologist at [redacted] Hospital ([redacted]), not being aware of the possibility of a PEG allergy and not having the knowledge of the testing available for this. Luckily, the Immunology at [redacted] have a more up to date awareness of the issue and have made testing accessible. If I had have settled for the initial clinical consult at [redacted] and did not continuing searching for answers, my health most certainly would have suffered further due to the incompetence and lack of knowledge of the practitioner at [redacted] Hospital.

2 years on from the initial vaccination program, I would expect as a minimum, consistency with up to date knowledge across the [redacted] Health Care System.

To be clear, protocols for the treatment of Covid vaccine injuries were being developed by doctors and researchers around the world at this time. However, they were not being developed in Australia (and there are still no public, national, accessible guidelines for GPs or patients about how to identify or treat medically recognised Covid vaccine reaction outcomes).

Lack of government funded medical research

Trying to find treatment protocols that are based on research coming out of Australia is impossible because government funded institutions will not conduct research into vaccine injury for fear of losing credibility (and funding) by being labelled as misinformation. The atmosphere of censorship that has been allowed to develop in Australia because of the gagging of public debate around anything to do with Covid vaccine harms, has had a direct effect on our scientific community, stifling their ability to objectively investigate and examine adverse outcomes from Covid vaccines.

For myself and my treating medical professionals this has meant we have had no assistance from the Australian research community as we have sought to find evidence-based testing and treatment options. This has prolonged my suffering and worsened the long term impact on my health.

Trying to find support groups once injured

There are no government support groups, therapies, rehabilitation or even treatment plans. I had to find these things myself, but again this has been incredibly difficult to find because of the censorship on social media. People must talk in code about their vaccine injury, and support groups are therefore very difficult to find, and in many instances have been shut down by social media companies for the perverse reason that discussion of very real and incredibly debilitating vaccine reactions was somehow of harm to the community.

Trying to talk to family and friends about what has happened on social media and being censored

Personal posts to family and friends, sharing news of what has happened to me, why I was no longer working, why I was no longer able to go out socially, were censored. Despite my story, and the similar stories of many thousands of other Australians, being factual, social media and other media actors (including government representatives) sought to silence my voice and the facts of my situation, causing further harm and a significant amount of distress to myself and my family.

Government misinformation

Since critical public discussion of the Covid vaccines was censored, and only the official “safe & effective” messaging was allowed to be shared online, known and potential risks of these vaccines were suppressed, even though many were identified long before governments officially recognised them (and today, there are still many acknowledged adverse reactions that our governments have not told the public about through its official channels).

This environment led me to believe that the vaccine would be safe for me, and that I would be well looked after if something adverse happened. This has turned out not to be the case, and the government along with social media actors are still perpetuating misinformation about the real risks associated with these vaccines leading to more Australians becoming seriously injured by them.

Censorship of all messaging other than official government claims of vaccine safety is directly responsible for my decision to get vaccinated, which has caused me significant harm. The government and social media organisations must take responsibility for this harm, and any and all efforts that seek to ensure that this environment continues will only ensure that more Australians will be harmed as a direct result of this official misinformation.

Conclusion & Recommendations

As previously stated, I am a vaccine-injured Australian. I am not interested in receiving or sharing misinformation or disinformation, but within the current framework of government controlled and tightly defined parameters regarding Covid vaccine information, I have been abandoned and left to fend for myself.

If a situation such as my own, and that of other vaccine-injured Australians, can occur within the current legislative and industry frameworks, surely this is a red flag that further tightening of this legislation is only going to create more innocent and unintended victims, not only on this issue but on *any* issue that authorities and consensus groups determine they don't want discussed in public.

It is my recommendation that all efforts (including this bill) that serve to censor or hide unpopular views, regardless of perceived basis in fact or consensus positions, be abandoned.