**After COVID-19: do we want to go back to ‘normal’?**
By Ellen Sandell, State MP for Melbourne

What a strange start to the year we’ve all had.

In January, if you’d told me I’d spend two months locked down at home with my 3 year old and 1 year old, unable to see family and friends, and with playgrounds, cafes and schools all closed, I wouldn’t have believed it!

2020 sure has dealt us some cruel blows, especially for those affected by the bushfires who have also had to deal with unemployment, home-schooling, anxiety, and everything else that has come with this pandemic.

While it’s been an incredibly tough start to the year, this pandemic has also shone a light on some of the best aspects of humanity.

Whilst physically apart, communities like ours have come together in the most incredible ways.

In my street we’ve started a Neighbour’s Whatsapp group and people have offered to buy groceries for each other. I’ve noticed people much more willing to smile at each other and say hello as they pass by on their daily walk (at an appropriate distance, of course!).

We’ve seen state and federal governments jump in to help out the vulnerable, with increases to JobSeeker, JobKeeper, free childcare, and housing for those who are sleeping rough on our streets.

As we look towards life after COVID-19, now is the time to ask: what kind of society do we want to build?

Do we really want to return to ‘normal’ if that means a record number of people sleeping rough on the streets, an unemployment system that leaves many people behind and an economic system that values profit over the planet?

Instead, I’d like to see us build a better ‘normal’.

The Covid-19 crisis has taught us that governments can make bold, transformative decisions when they need to. For example, the Victorian Government has set aside more than $24 billion for our state’s recovery and to help people back into work.

With this, we have the opportunity to do things differently.

I believe our community would like to see our government use this to build tens of thousands more public homes, to make sure everyone has a roof over their head; to create jobs in building renewable energy infrastructure; to fund a huge environmental restoration program which would create jobs for young people as well as restore ecosystems and communities damaged in the summer’s bushfires; and to boost our public hospitals and public schools, so no-one has to go to a school that’s falling down around them, and so our carers, educators, and healthcare workers are paid properly for the incredible work they do.

I call this a ‘Green New Deal’ or ‘building a better normal’, but I’d love to hear your ideas for what this could look like. Post-pandemic, is there something you’d like to see done differently? What society do you want to build, now we’ve been reminded what is truly important?

Please email me at office@ellensandell.com and let me know. I’d love to hear your thoughts on how we create a society that puts people’s health and happiness first.