

Harvard Medical Prof. Says the Government's Pandemic Response 'Failed Miserably'

Dr. Stefanos Kales, a professor of medicine at Harvard University, has joined [the chorus of voices](#) who are saying the government's response to the pandemic was a mistake and public health officials should shift to a policy of protecting the vulnerable.

"I think what we saw is the danger of turning over public policy and public health recommendations to people who have had their careers exclusively focused on infectious diseases as opposed to public health in general," said Kales, who also serves as a director at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

Kale, who made the comments [in an interview on CNBC](#), said it was "a big mistake" to ignore economic considerations while responding to the pandemic.

"Public health is a balance," said Kales, who last month [published a letter on LinkedIn](#) saying health officials should allow the young and healthy to "move on" from this pandemic. "How many businesses closed and did not make it through that first six to twelve months? A lot of these restaurants, their business is still way down. Large companies can survive, but a lot of small businesses have gone under. And that takes a toll on the health of people who work there or own those businesses."

Kale described the public health response as a failure because it failed to take into account all the collateral damage of government restrictions.

"This whole idea of we just ignore everything else in the

economy and health and well-being to try to get to zero COVID cases [was] never a realistic goal and it has failed miserably,” Kales said. “We haven’t balanced all these other things. The fentanyl overdoses in the US are at a record high as well as other opioids. Suicidality in young people. It’s a big mistake.”

‘We’ve Not Been Pro-Lockdown’

Many of the points Kales raises are issues *FEE* [has been highlighting](#) for the last 18 months.

The lockdowns [did tragically correspond](#) with record drug overdoses. Youth suicide and depression did surge during the government’s [response to the pandemic](#). A host of other unintended consequences did accompany lockdowns, including an unprecedented ([and deadly](#)) drop in cancer screenings, widespread [bankruptcies](#), social unrest, millions of job losses, and an estimated [150 million people](#) pushed into extreme poverty globally. (Not to mention [the 8 million](#) in the U.S. who also fell into poverty.)

Meanwhile, a myriad of studies have shown that [lockdowns were mostly ineffective](#) at slowing COVID-19 and reducing death, research that was recently corroborated by a Johns Hopkins University [meta-analysis](#) that concluded “lockdowns have had little to no effect on COVID-19 mortality.”

When asked about the Johns Hopkins study on Friday, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki refused to defend lockdowns, saying instead they were primarily a policy deployed by the previous administration.

“We’ve not been pro-lockdown,” Psaki said, pointing out that forced businesses and school closures primarily were tools of the previous administration.

Psaki is not entirely wrong; the harshest and most prolonged

lockdowns came in 2020 prior to Biden's presidency, when they were embraced by nearly all states under federal guidance. Still, it's worth noting that both Psaki and [candidate Biden](#) supported the use of lockdowns, and—history aside—her refusal to defend the harmful policy invites important questions today.

For starters, why does the White House continue to retain the services of the architect of the federal government's lockdown policy—Dr. Anthony Fauci, the chief medical advisor of President Biden and his predecessor, President Trump—despite the damage of the coercive policies he's championed?

A Stubborn Economic Fallacy

History will decide who to blame for the government's lockdown policies, which caused so much harm but achieved so little. What's important to understand is how these policies came about.

There are many lessons to be sure, including F. A. Hayek's [prophetic warning](#) about the evil man is capable of if he fails to recognize “the insuperable limits to his knowledge” while armed with the immense power of government and physical science.

But Kales' description of why the government's restrictive policies have been so harmful—“we just ignore everything else in the economy and health and well-being to try to get to zero COVID”—calls to mind one of the most important lessons in economics.

In his classic work *Economics in One Lesson*, Henry Hazlitt—building on the insights of the French economist Frédéric Bastiat, author of [That Which Is Seen, and That Which Is Not Seen](#)—observed one of the biggest flaws of policymaking.

“[There is a] persistent tendency of men to see only the

immediate effects of a given policy, or its effects only on a special group, and to neglect to inquire what the long-run effects of that policy will be not only on that special group but on all groups,” Hazlitt observed. “It is the fallacy of overlooking secondary consequences.”


Hazlitt continued:

In this lies almost the whole difference between good economics and bad. The bad economist sees only what immediately strikes the eye; the good economist also looks beyond. The bad economist sees only the direct consequences of a proposed course; the good economist looks also at the longer and indirect consequences. The bad economist sees only what the effect of a given policy has been or will be on one particular group; the good economist inquires also what the effect of the policy will be on all groups.

This is precisely the phenomenon described by Dr. Kales, who told CNBC that public officials must *balance* the potential benefits of an action with its costs, including its secondary and unseen costs.

To say it was “a big mistake” to not consider such consequences is a massive understatement.

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