

## **Statement in full by Dr Andre Oboler, CEO of the Online Hate Prevention Institute**

Those engaged in the anti-lockdown protests and their online communities come from a range of fringe movements, and their numbers are boosted by some ordinary people who act out in frustration. Misinformation plays a significant role in the anti-lockdown movement. It's not just misinformation about Covid and vaccines, but about the law, the powers of police, and even about the anti-lockdown movement itself. Few, for example, are aware of the German conspiracy group, the Free Citizens of Kassel, that sparked much of the Australian anti-lockdown movement.

In the midst of claims and counterclaims, the usual scapegoating occurs. Jews are once again being blamed. The actions of governments working to keep their citizens safe from a very real health threat, are in this world of conspiracy, instead presented as an unjustified exertion of control. An unconscionable interference with personal freedom. These government actions to protect the public are misrepresented as unreasonable impositions made in the name of a made up, or at least greatly exaggerated, threat. It all leads back to the question, who is behind it, who benefits? And as in the times of Tsarist Russia, then Nazi Germany, we see echos of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion claiming it is the Jews who are behind the curtain pulling the strings.

This situation starts not with anti-lockdown groups who conflate their messaging with rabid antisemitism, but with rabid antisemites seeking to build a popular base out of the anti-lockdown movement. Some of these antisemites aim to turn themselves into leaders people recognise and trust, and to use that trust to indoctrinate their supporters into antisemitic conspiracy theories. Some of the leaders are local, others operate internationally. Some Australians seek out other groups and movements and bring back their ideas, symbols, and conspiracies. The anti-lockdown movement is drawing together those people most susceptible to conspiracies, including antisemitic conspiracies, and it is going to accelerate the spread of antisemitic ideas.