



The Hon. Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister

The Hon. Greg Hunt MP
Minister for Health
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Cabinet

The Hon. Richard Colbeck
Minister for Aged Care and Senior Australians
Minister for Youth and Sport

JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

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\$2.4 BILLION HEALTH PLAN TO FIGHT COVID-19

The Australian Government has unveiled a comprehensive \$2.4 billion health package to protect all Australians, including vulnerable groups such as the elderly, those with chronic conditions and Indigenous communities, from the coronavirus (COVID-19).

The package provides unprecedented support across primary care, aged care, hospitals, research and the national medical stockpile.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the Government was ensuring Australia's health system was well-prepared and had the resources it needed to fight coronavirus and protect the community.

"Australia isn't immune but with this \$2.4 billion boost we're as well prepared as any country in the world," the Prime Minister said.

"This package is about preventing and treating coronavirus in the coming weeks.

"Our medical experts have been preparing for an event like this for years and this is the next step up in Australia's plan.

"Our Government alongside the country's leading medical experts is working around the clock to ensure we have the right tools, information and resources to keep Australians safe."

Minister for Health Greg Hunt said the Government was boosting the capacity of the health system to effectively assess, diagnose and treat people with COVID-19 in a way that minimises spread of the disease in the community.

“We are ensuring people can access essential care in a way that reduces their potential exposure to infection. This includes support for telehealth, primary care and medical supplies,” Minister Hunt said.

Primary care

\$100 million will fund a new Medicare service for people in home isolation or quarantine, as a result coronavirus, to receive health consultations via the phone or video such as FaceTime or Skype.

The telehealth service will help contain the spread of the virus and it will be bulk-billed at no cost to patients and will be available from Friday 13 March.

These telehealth consultation services will be provided by doctors, both GPs and specialists, nurses and mental health allied health workers and will also be available under Medicare for people aged over 70, people with chronic diseases, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged over 50, people who are immunocompromised, pregnant people and new parents with babies.

These people are at greater risk from the virus and treatment home will minimise their risk of exposure. This will be available to these groups for non-coronavirus consultations as a general health measure.

The Government will provide \$25 million to fund home medicines services which will enable patients to have their PBS prescriptions filled online or remotely, and have the medicines delivered to their home.

This service will be available for people in home isolation and for vulnerable patient groups.

All pharmacies with e-prescribing will be eligible to participate in the home medicines services and patients will continue to retain choice in their preferred community pharmacy.

To support GPs and pharmacies, the Government will fast track the rollout of electronic prescribing across Australia with funding of \$5 million.

Patients will have access to services via the GP, telehealth, the national hotline, state hotlines, dedicated respiratory clinics and hospitals.

The national triage phone line will therefore be expanded with an additional \$50.7 million in funding, operating 24/7 to provide advice to patients.

The free-call hotline will advise people on the best course of action depending on their symptoms and risks. Medical staff will direct people to the nearest hospital or respiratory clinic, or advise them to stay home and self-monitor, or contact their GP.

People who are not severely ill with COVID-19 – 80 per cent of people will have a mild illness – will be directed to GPs or a network of well-resourced GP-led respiratory clinics.

The Government is investing \$206.7 million for up to 100 dedicated respiratory clinics. The Primary Health Networks will co-ordinate with the AMA, RACGP and states and territories to identify areas of need. The clinics will be a one-stop-shop for people who are concerned they may have the virus, to be tested and isolated from other patients.

People living and working in remote locations, in particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, will benefit from increased capacity to prevent outbreaks, including the tools to

proactively screen visitors and fly-in, fly-out workers, additional support to evacuate early cases if required, and mobile respiratory clinics to quickly respond to outbreaks where there is no hospital or available health service. \$58.7 million will be provided to support these functions.

The Government will establish dedicated Medicare funded and bulk billed pathology test for COVID-19. This is expected to cost \$170.2 million and patients will also receive both the COVID-19 and flu test. Funding will also be provided for pathology testing to be conducted in aged care facilities.

Aged care

Senior Australians will be protected through a major funding boost of \$101.2 million to educate and train aged care workers in infection control, and enable aged care providers to hire extra nurses and aged care workers for both residential and home care.

Additional aged care staff will be available for deployment to facilities as needed, where an urgent health response is required and to provide extra support for staff and training.

The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission will receive additional funding to work with providers on improving infection control.

Hospitals

The Government has already announced \$500 million in funding for the states and territories for COVID-19. The Commonwealth will pay for half of all additional costs incurred by states and territories in diagnosing and treating patients with COVID-19, or suspected of having the disease, and efforts to minimise the spread of the disease. This will be provided on a 50-50 basis for state health COVID-19 activities both within and outside hospitals.

The funding, beginning with an initial upfront payment of \$100 million from the Commonwealth, is over and above ongoing public hospitals funding to the states and territories under the National Health Reform Agreement. The funding will be uncapped and demand driven.

Research

The Government will allocate \$30 million from the Medical Research Future Fund for vaccine, anti-viral and respiratory medicine research. This will enable Australian researchers to be at the forefront of the drive to develop both treatments and a vaccine.

National Support for Ongoing Response

Ensuring Australia has sufficient medicines, face masks and other personal protective equipment is crucial to the COVID-19 response. Funding of \$1.1 billion will ensure patients and critical health care staff have face masks, and other protective equipment such as surgical gowns, goggles and hand sanitiser for health professionals.

This funding will also be used to purchase antibiotics and antivirals for the National Medical Stockpile, so that patients who experience secondary infection as a result of COVID-19 can be treated quickly, and health effects minimised.

The Government will also invest \$30 million in infection control training and programs for health and aged care workers.

Communication

\$30 million will deliver a new national communications campaign - across all media – to provide people with practical advice on how they can play their part in containing the virus and staying healthy.

The campaign will keep the health and aged care industry informed, including providing up to date clinical guidance, triaging and caring for patients, development of an app and advice to workers in looking after their own safety.

The information will be based on the most up to date medical advice and will be targeted at the entire community as well as high risk groups and in up to 20 languages.

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