

An open letter to Victorians

July 2020

Dear Victorians,

Healthcare does not stop for lockdown, we are here to keep you well

- Healthcare is one of the four reasons you can leave home, and it is safe to visit health services in person when you need to*
- Don't delay getting the healthcare you need, for an existing condition or new symptoms
- Talk to your health provider if you have any concerns about how to access your care safely

We know this year has been tough so far. The good news is lives have already been saved with COVID-19 restrictions and this can continue by following the latest health advice to slow the spread of the virus, and by continuing to look after our own health.

While we are focused on COVID-19, no one can afford to put off other areas of their own healthcare. Health issues do not stop when there is a pandemic – we want to avoid unnecessary illness, complications and hospitalisation for chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, asthma, mental health conditions and cancer. And the only way to do this is if patients keep up their regular healthcare appointments.

Remember, there are four reasons that people in areas under Stage 3 restrictions can leave home; healthcare is one of them.

While we continue to take the necessary precautions to protect our wider community against COVID-19, it's important to also look after the other aspects of our mental and physical health. We want to reassure Victorians that your healthcare services remain open and ready to support you.

Many people may have already missed out on a healthcare appointment, either for new symptoms or a check-up for an existing issue. Please do not delay any further. Even before COVID-19 restrictions, we were concerned about the low numbers of people getting cancer screening tests. We are already working to improve early detection and monitoring of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease and asthma and to reduce the number of undiagnosed cases. We don't want COVID-19 to make these problems worse.

The same goes for mental health. We know that since the pandemic hit, higher levels of anxiety and psychological distress have been reported in the general population. Anyone experiencing mental health symptoms should seek help, whether you are managing an existing condition, or the symptoms are new.

As we have been in lockdown before healthcare services have adapted to make it easier for you to access the care you need.

Accessing care from your general practice team, and other health professionals is easier than ever, with video chat and telephone consultations available – as well as safe in-person consultations for those who need them. Pharmacies are still open in locked down areas with pharmacists ready and able to provide advice as well as the medicines you need, and home delivery of medication can also be arranged.

Remember, health services are open to see you face to face and it remains safe to visit in person when you need to, with infection prevention measures, hygiene and social distancing in place. So, if you or someone you care for is putting off a visit to your GP, nurse, an allied health professional or a pathology test – it's time to get the care you need. Don't delay, it could save your life.

We understand you may be feeling worried and have questions about how you can access healthcare safely; we encourage you to talk to your healthcare providers and ask those questions.

So please get in touch, make that call, and if you need an appointment, book one today. We're here to support you and help keep you well.

Signed by:

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine, Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia,

The Pharmacy Guild, The Pharmaceutical Society of Australia, Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association, Allied Health Professions Australia, Asthma Australia, The Heart Foundation, Diabetes Australia, Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia, Australian Cervical Cancer Foundation, Consumers Health Forum, Pathology Awareness Australia, National Rural Health Alliance, Medicines Australia, Patient Voice Initiative, Jean Hailes Foundation, Australian Diabetes Educators Association, Medical Technology Association of Australia, Australian Patients Association, Pathology Technology Australia, Australian Clinical Trials Alliance, Epilepsy Action Australia, Immune Deficiencies Foundation Australia, ausEE

**If you have any respiratory symptoms please contact your health provider first*