

## COVID-19 Plan a strong response to counter pandemic threat

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The Federal Government's \$2.4 billion health plan to fight COVID-19 is an impressive and wide-ranging response that prepares Australians and health services well to counter the threat of a pandemic, the Consumers Health Forum said today.

"The provision of bulk-billed telehealth medical services, home medicine deliveries, support for additional aged care staff and increased service capacity for First Nations People in remote locations are all welcome and much-needed initiatives," the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells, said.

"It is particularly commendable that the new Medicare telehealth service will be rolled out promptly, from this Friday. The telehealth consultations will be provided by GPs and specialists, nurses and mental health allied health workers. They will be available under Medicare for people aged over 70, those with chronic diseases, First Nations People aged over 50, people who are immunocompromised, pregnant women and parents with new babies.

"The national triage phone line will be expanded. Free-call national and state hotlines to advise people on the best course of action depending on their symptoms and risks have the potential to do much to reduce community anxiety and unnecessary strain on clinical services.

"The establishment of up to 100 dedicated respiratory clinics will also help meet the demand for immediate attention for people with worrying symptoms. Primary Health Networks have a key role in mobilising to get the respiratory clinics in place and we hope they will have sufficient resources to achieve that quickly on top off their business as usual.

"It also welcome that pharmacies with e-prescribing will be eligible to participate in the home medicines services.

"The coming weeks will place a heavy load on Australia's health system and workforce. We are fortunate that we have the capacity to meet the challenge of COVID-19 and one of the important factors will be a vigorous community and consumer information campaign.

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“We welcome the announcement of a \$30 million national media campaign 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 sectors informed, including with up to date clinical guidance, caring for patients, and the development of an app and advice to workers in looking after their own safety.

“Australia is not immune. We have a good health system and this package adds significant scaffolding,” Ms Wells said.

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