

Non-COVID patients also need care

MEDIA RELEASE THURSDAY 16 APRIL 2020

Patients in need of routine care for chronic and other conditions should feel they can see the doctor and not be dissuaded by fear of COVID-19, the Consumers Health Forum said today.

“We are concerned at reports by professional bodies and health services that patients are putting off seeing the doctor or going to hospitals because of worries about catching COVID-19,” the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells, said.

“We hear that attendances at many GP clinics, pathology centres, hospital emergency departments and other health services are down significantly. That should be a concern for all Australians. People should not delay having necessary checks and treatment which may be vital in preventing serious illness.

“Feedback and surveys from some CHF members tell us some patients and carers are not accessing GPs services and medications for general health issues due to worries about COVID-19.

“We expect that the introduction of telehealth services will reduce the need for many patients to see the doctor or allied health professionals face-to-face but there is more work to be done to make patients aware of the new and innovative steps GPs and pharmacies are taking to care for their patients. However there remain many instances where patients need the doctor to undertake physical tests or order diagnostic tests like pathology or x-rays.

“The result of foregone treatments can be avoidable disease and disability which could leave Australia with sicker patients whose needs put further strain on health resources required to counter COVID.

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“It is right and understandable that the community takes every care to avoid COVID risks and we hail the courage and skill doctors and nurses have displayed in both treating COVID patients and preventing spread of the virus.

“However public anxiety particularly when it discourages people from getting the care they need underlines the importance of clear and rigorous safety measures at health centres.

“Governments must ensure that public warnings about COVID do not scare people away from the treatment they need for other conditions such as chronic disease where ongoing continuous care is so vital,” Ms Wells said.

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