

UPDATE FROM THE OFFICE

There is no shortage of information about COVID-19. The [ACT Government COVID-19 webpage](#) is an important one to check regularly. Another one I look at most days is www.covid19data.com.au/. It is not an authoritative or official source of epidemiological data rather, it captures the announcements and representations made to the Australian public and represents this in a way that helps people to understand. At the other end of the spectrum is the daily digest released by the [Agency for Clinical Innovation \(ACI\)](#) in NSW. It contains recently released reports and evidence on Covid-19. While the content is harder to understand and more technical it is worth a look [here](#). The [Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare](#) also has a useful page with links.

The availability of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) has been very limited over the past few weeks, and this is slowly improving. This has been something we have been talking to the Government about in the Non-Government Organisation (NGO) Leadership Forum. ACT Health is working closely with the Community Services Directorate (CSD) to ensure that PPE is prioritised for people that need it most. They are also negotiating access to supplies for NGOs who provide services that require PPE where those organisations may have issues with their supply chains.

The consistent use of appropriate PPE will help ensure its availability and the safety of healthcare staff. The Commonwealth Department of Health has released guidance on the use of PPE in hospitals during the COVID-19 outbreak. It is available [here](#).

This week we received the resignation of Kristal Coe. Kristal was on leave without pay from HCCA to work on a project on youth homelessness at the [Youth Coalition of the ACT](#). This project has been extended and Kristal will continue at YouthCo to complete this project. This is a loss for HCCA. Kristal has done some fine work for us and has been a highly valued member of the team. We wish her well.

A reminder that our next HCCA Members Forum is on 27 May 2020. We are going ahead with this and will hold it on Zoom as a teleconference. It will be a shorter meeting and we are finalising the agenda at the moment. We will send an email with the details to join and tips on how to use Zoom. If you need support Karen can help you. Please contact the office to arrange a time for her to have a chat with you about how to use Zoom.

[COVID-19 Update](#)

[Health Literacy Update](#)

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HCCA EVENTS

Members' Forum by Zoom

11am - 12pm
Wed 27 May 2020

HCCA Consumer Issues Report Week 5

- [Click link here](#)

HCCA blog

- [Make the most of your appointment – telehealth or face-to-face](#)
by Claudia Cresswell

We have been using Zoom extensively in our staff meetings and meetings with other agencies. Our Executive Committee is meeting on Zoom too. It is seamless to use. You can join by clicking on a link that we send you in an email. You may need to download the software prior to joining a Zoom meeting, depending on what device you use. You can use Zoom on your computer, tablet or smartphone. We think it is a good option for HCCA as we are generally not discussing anything private or highly confidential. There has been some public discussion of privacy and security with Zoom but no more than using Facebook.

And remember, don't drink or inject disinfectant.

*Darlene Cox
Executive Director*

COVID19 UPDATE

More Testing Options

Testing for coronavirus in Canberra has expanded with the opening of two new GP Respiratory Clinics and a privately-operated drive-through testing centre in Weston adding to the two existing government testing sites. As well, Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service is providing a culturally appropriate assessment and testing clinic for First Nations people.

At the new drive-through clinic, testing will be free to anyone with a Medicare card but only with a referral by a doctor. The [Laverty Pathology information sheet is here](#). You can read the [Canberra Times article here](#). The details are as follows:

- corner of Parkinson Street and Namatjira Drive, Weston
- open from Monday to Friday 8am - 4pm, Saturday 9am - 1pm
- doctor must complete a request form and send this to the patient
- patients will need to arrive in a vehicle and have the GP referral, their Medicare card and ID
- patients must remain in vehicle while a nurse in full protective equipment will perform the test
- each patient **MUST** have a completed pathology request form from their doctor with patient details (address, date of birth, contact phone number, Medicare card)

Testing at the two existing ACT Government centres does not require a doctor referral. The details are as follows:

- Weston Creek Walk-in Centre, 24 Parkinson Street, Weston Creek (open 7.30am - 10pm daily). If possible, you should travel using a private mode of transport, such as a private car, to minimise exposure to others.
- Drive Through Respiratory Assessment Clinic at Flemington Rd & Northbourne Ave, Mitchell (open 9.30am – 6pm daily (last car accepted at 5pm). You must be driving or a passenger in a registered motor vehicle or motorbike to attend this clinic. It cannot be accessed from public transport or on foot.

To access a GP Respiratory Clinic, you may first consult your usual GP (through telehealth, by phone or video conference) and then make an appointment with one of the clinics, if recommended by your usual GP. You can read more [here](#).

When travelling to the GP or Respiratory Clinic, do not attend any public places, such as shops or cafes on the way. If using public transport is your only option, you should wear a mask, avoid direct contact with other people (including other passengers, drivers and transport staff), cough/sneeze into your elbow, and wash your hands before and after you travel.

You do not need to visit an Emergency Department unless you have severe symptoms, such as shortness of breath, chest pain or very high fever. If you develop serious symptoms, call triple zero (000) immediately. Let them know if you've had close contact with someone who has had COVID-19.

Where to get tested for COVID-19 in the ACT:

1. New GP Respiratory Clinics in the ACT – appointment only

<p>NORTHSIDE YourGP@Crace 1/5 Barrata St, CRACE ph. 6109 0000 yourgpcrace.com.au or gprespiratoryclinic.com.au</p>	<p>SOUTHSIDE Lakeview Medical Practice Tuggeranong 1/216 Cowlshaw St, GREENWAY ph. 6185 1986 lakeviewmedical.com.au</p>	<p>ABORIGINAL HEALTH SERVICE Winnunga Nimmitjiah Aboriginal Health Service 63 Boolimba Crescent, NARRABUNDAH ph. 6284 6222 winnunga.org.au</p>
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2. Respiratory Assessment Clinics

<p>WALK-IN Weston Creek Walk-in Centre 24 Parkinson St, WESTON 7.30am – 10pm daily, including public holidays.</p>	<p>DRIVE THROUGH Respiratory Assessment Clinic at Exhibition Park in Canberra (EPIC) Flemington Rd & Northbourne Ave, MITCHELL 9.30am - 6pm daily (last car accepted at 5pm).</p>	<p>DRIVE THROUGH Lavery Pathology Corner of Parkinson Street and Namatjira Drive, WESTON 8am - 4pm Mon-Fri, Saturday 9am - 1pm.</p>
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Elective Surgery and Procedures Restart

Following a National Cabinet decision, Australian hospitals commenced easing restrictions on elective surgery, investigations and procedures from 27 April 2020. Health services are required to prepare and implement an organisation-wide Risk Management Strategy to manage and reduce the risk related to the transmission of COVID-19. The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) has developed advice to support health service organisations and clinicians implement these requirements. You can read the [Fact Sheet here](#).

The ACT is working through the public wait lists to reschedule some patients, based on clinical urgency. "The decision to reinstate elective surgery in a careful and staged approach has been made possible following the success of public health measures implemented in response to COVID-19 and continued low numbers of COVID-19 cases," Minister Stephen-Smith said. These will be all Category 1 surgeries and procedures, all Category 2 and selected Category 3 and other procedures. These may include:

- IVF
- screening programs (cancer, including breast cancer)
- post cancer reconstruction procedures
- procedures for children under 18 years of age
- cataracts and eye procedures
- endoscopy and colonoscopy procedures
- planning is also underway to reinstate some dental services.
- joint replacements (including knees, hips and shoulders)

A summary of the [Canberra Health Services website](#) says:

- if your elective surgery has been confirmed and booked, you will be contacted directly by the relevant hospital
- patients are asked not to contact hospitals so staff can prioritise contacting those with the most urgent needs
- surgeries will be conducted safely with appropriate Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) supplies
- if your condition changes, talk to your GP or your surgeon. If you have any concerns or questions you can contact the Territory Wide Surgical Services Team on [5124 9889](#)

What do the categories refer to for waiting times?

When you are referred to a specialist the GP gives you a category based on urgency. These are:

- Urgent (Category 1) – specialist consultation recommended within 30 days of being added to the outpatient wait list
- Semi-urgent (Category 2) – specialist consultation recommended within 90 days of being added to the outpatient wait list
- Non-urgent (Category 3) – specialist consultation recommended within 365 days of being added to the outpatient wait list.

Medicare Change for Ineligible Access to Medicare

There has been an update to policy in relation to access for health services for Medicare ineligible patients in the ACT.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Medicare ineligible patients requiring either treatment for COVID-19 or public health services relating to COVID-19 will be provided with access to medical care. This includes pathology, diagnostic, pharmaceutical and outpatient care in ACT public health system free of charge. The cost of this will be met jointly by the Commonwealth and the ACT Government.

Medicare ineligible patients are classified as people that:

- are not an Australian permanent resident; or
- are not entitled to hold a valid Medicare card; or
- are temporary entrants or temporary visa holders; or
- are not from a country that has a Reciprocal Health Care Arrangement with Australia.

An overseas visitor or an international student are common examples of people who may be Medicare ineligible. This arrangement does not apply to Medicare ineligible persons who use their private health insurance or travel insurance policy or have a contract with a Visiting Medical Officer. This arrangement will be back dated to 21 January 2020 and will be in place for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic. You can read more [here](#).

COVID-19 – Advice for Pet Owners

The [Australian Veterinary Association](#) (AVA) has produced a [fact sheet](#) for pet owners regarding COVID-19. They advise that:

- there is currently no evidence you can get COVID-19 from your pet
- keep your pets with you in your family unit
- plan for the care of your pets in case you need to go to hospital
- continue to practice good hand hygiene before and after handling your pet, their food and their food and water bowls.
- review advice from your veterinary clinic before you visit. Follow their instructions to keep your family and veterinary staff safe from COVID-19.

This information is current as at 23 April 2020. The AVA has developed a [COVID-19 Information Hub](#) for veterinarians. You can also read information from the ACT Government about pets and COVID-19 [here](#).

HCCA COVID-19 Consumer Issues Register Reports

HCCA established a COVID-19 Consumer Issues Register in March 2020. The Register summarises issues raised by consumers and the HCCA actions in response. They are published weekly.

You can find the weekly reports that summarise the issues raised [here](#).

HEALTH LITERACY UPDATE

Symptoms of COVID-19, the Flu and a Cold Compared

Diagrams like this one from NZ epidemiologist [Siouxsie Wiles](#) can help our understanding of the differences between these three respiratory illnesses. It fits into a health literacy criteria for supporting understanding due to the number of devices it uses; boxes, pictures, colour and keys to understand frequency or severity using colour, ticks and crosses.

SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19, FLU AND COLD

	DRY COUGH	FEVER	RUNNY NOSE	SORE THROAT	BREATH-LESSNESS	HEADACHE	BODY ACHES	SNEEZE	FATIGUE	DIARRHOEA
COVID -19										
FLU										
COLD										

FREQUENTLY
 SOMETIMES
 LITTLE
 RARE
 NOT

Steps to Having Your Wishes Followed – Advance Care Planning

Advance Care Planning (ACP) Australia have provided advice to help your choices be heard and respected near the end of your life. An Advance Care Plan documents your wishes in case you can't express them yourself. Let COVID-19 be a catalyst to creating your Plan.

1. It starts with what's important to you - ACP starts with knowing yourself and what's most important to you. Think about what a good day looks like to you – whether it's being physically active, socialising with friends and family, eating or travel. These activities are a great starting point for articulating your values and making clear what makes life worth living for you.

2. Use the right forms - it is recommended that you use the official, legislated form for your ACP. These forms are well structured and capture the required information to guide your family and medical treatment team in decision making, should you ever be unable to speak for yourself. Go the [ACT Health website](#) for those relevant in the ACT. For other states/territory in Australia go [here](#).

3. Make it valid - it's worth getting it right. One reason an ACP might not be followed is because of the quality of the ACP. Sometimes the written instructions are unclear, inconsistent or not an accurate reflection of a person's preferences, making the documents unusable. Or it might not contain adequate identification such as date of birth, signature, date and/or witnesses.

4. Be clear about your values - while ACP forms differ across Australia, most provide an opportunity to complete both [values](#) and [instructional directives](#). The values directive helps others understand what is most important to you and what outcomes you would find intolerable (i.e. unable to speak, unable to live independently). The instructional directive specifies which medical treatments you would

consent to, refuse or prefer to avoid (e.g. tube feeding, CPR etc.).

The instructional directive relies on a good working knowledge of medical treatments. It can be challenging to fully understand the benefits and burdens of different treatments. You may prefer to complete this with your treating team.

5. Speak up - completing the forms is a great step in securing your future health care however there's no substitute for good conversations. Be clear with your family and loved ones about your choices and help them understand the choices you've made. If they ever need to advocate on your behalf or make decisions for you, it will be easier for them to work with your medical treatment team and communicate your preferences.

6. Keep it up-to-date - life changes and so do you. It's important to review your ACP every few years. Major life events such as retirement, divorce, onset of a significant illness or a change in your prognosis are good opportunities to dust off your plan and review it with fresh eyes.

7. Make it accessible - it's critical that you make it accessible. Your ACP is of little use to anyone if the only copy is locked away in your solicitor's office. As most ACPs are needed in an emergency situation or crisis, we recommend that you have it readily available at home, and give copies to your GP, loved ones and local hospital. We also advise that you upload your ACP to [My Health Record](#) making it accessible, anywhere, anytime.

For more information go to:

<https://www.advancecareplanning.org.au/#/>

*Claudia Cresswell
Health Literacy Officer*

CONSUMER REFERENCE GROUP REPORTS AND INFORMATION

Quality & Safety - Contact Tracing Leads to Earlier Isolation

A study on contact-based surveillance published in *Lancet Infectious Diseases* states that contact tracing of COVID-19 means infected individuals are diagnosed more than two days earlier and isolate nearly two days earlier than they would otherwise.

Researchers from the Shenzhen Center for Disease Control and Prevention retrospectively examined data from 391 SARS-CoV-2 cases and 1286 close contacts. They found that positive cases isolated on average 4.6 days after developing symptoms, but those who were contracted traced isolated themselves 1.9 days earlier than this. You can read about it at *The Medical Republic* [here](#).

ITEMS OF INTEREST

Online Forum: Bringing the Community Voice to COVID-19 Discussions

Will technology save us? The health consumer peak organisations across Australia are convening a [free online forum](#) so that you can share your views, aspirations and concerns for the way forward with COVID-19. The forum will look at two key topics:

- the newly created Government contact tracing app, COVIDSafe and the implications of its use
- telehealth and its effectiveness in the wake of COVID-19 crisis

There will be the opportunity to discuss other emerging matters and there will be several interactive breakout sessions.

Date: 11am-1pm, Thursday 7 May 2020

Where: Online, via Zoom (further details will be provided after registration)

Register: [here](#)



Join a Webinar for World Asthma Day – 5 May 2020

World Asthma Day is an annual event organized by the [Global Initiative for Asthma \(GINA\)](#) to improve asthma awareness and care around the world.

In this **free one-hour** World Asthma Day webinar, 'Ask the Experts', you'll hear from a panel of experts and have the opportunity to seek information to unanswered questions about your asthma, including concerns around Coronavirus (COVID-19), mental health and the greater risks that come with winter. It will be hosted by Michele Goldman, Asthma Australia CEO.

Date: 12pm, 5 May 2020.

Register: [Here](#)

Useful Newsletters

ACTCOSS

- COVID-19 Update [here](#)

Canberra Lung Life

- November edition [here](#)

ACT Health COVID-19

- Latest update [here](#)

Consumers Health Forum of Australia

- April edition [here](#)

Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander update [here](#)
- Multicultural community update [here](#)

Digital Health Agency

- COVID-19 Special Edition [here](#)

Public Health Association of Australia

- Coronavirus update [here](#)

COVID-19 RESOURCES

For up to date information about COVID-19 check the following websites and social media channels:

ACT Health: <https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/>

Healthdirect: <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/coronavirus> (This has information in other languages)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ACTHealthDirectorate/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ACTHealth>

ACT Government Helpline: Ph 6207 7244 8am-8pm daily or www.covid19.act.gov.au/contact-us

Commonwealth Department of Health: <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>

ACT Communicable Disease Control (CDC) team: Ph 5124 9213 or 9962 4155 after hours.

Symptom checker:

https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1504974/CV_Identifying-symptoms.pdf

If you are concerned and want further information you can call the Australian Government **Coronavirus Health Information Line** on [1800 020 080](tel:1800020080) 24 hours/day, seven days a week.

RECENT APPOINTMENTS

- Darlene Cox – Self-Care Expert Working Groups, Mitchell Institute, Victoria University.

CONSUMER PARTICIPATION

HCCA has cancelled all events that were planned until 30 June. We will review this decision at that time. We advise consumer representatives not to attend face-to-face meetings of the committees that they are members of. Consumer representatives can continue to contribute to committee work remotely.

HCCA Consumer Participation Training was due to be held this May. It has been cancelled and we will schedule it later in the year. Please contact Karen James at karenjames@hacca.org.au or 6230 7800 to be notified when the training is to be held again.

Clinical Review Committee – CHS

Canberra Health Services (CHS) is seeking a consumer member on its Clinical Review Committee. This high-level committee oversees clinical review and audit processes, and critically assesses, reviews, reports and makes recommendations for assessment and action as required.

This position will suit an experienced consumer representative with an interest in quality and safety and clinical practice. For the foreseeable future, meetings are likely to involve videoconferencing. The successful consumer representative for this role will need a willingness and ability to read and consider a range of meeting papers before meetings occur.

More information about this opportunity and terms of Reference are available [here](#). You can nominate for this opportunity [here](#). This opportunity closes on **Tuesday 5 May 2020**.

OTHER COMMITTEE VACANCIES

Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation – Department of Health

The Australian Technical Advisory group on Immunisation (ATAGI) provides advice to the Minister for Health on the *Immunise Australia Program* and related issues.

ATAGI advises the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee on evidence relating to new, existing and emerging vaccines and their effectiveness and use in Australian populations. It consults with the national Immunisation Committee and works with this committee to produce the Australian Immunisation Handbook for the approval of the National Health and Medical Research Council. It also consults with the Communicable Diseases Network of Australia and Expert Advisory Committees of Therapeutic Goods Administration on matters concerning implementation of immunisation policies procedures and vaccine safety. Further information about ATAGI is available [here](#).

Consumers Health Forum is seeking expressions of Interest for a consumer representative. The current term will end in June 2021, and the appointment of a new consumer representative will allow a 12-month transition period. The appointment is for three years from June 2020 and is at the discretion of the Minister for Health, the Hon Greg Hunt MP. The work consists of six meetings per year and the Department of Health will cover travel costs and sitting fees.

Interested consumer representatives need to complete a CHF nomination form, available [here](#), a letter of endorsement from HCCA and a short CV in PDF format. Expressions of Interest close at midnight on **Sunday 17 May 2020**. For information contact Ghislaine Martin (g.martin@chf.org.au) and to request a letter of support contact Karen James (karenjames@hcca.org.au) or telephone 6230 7800.

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Consumer Bites is the newsletter from **Health Care Consumers' Association ACT**

Please note that Consumer Bites provides a small snippet of health related articles our members might find interesting to consider, ponder and analyse. The HCCA does not purport to endorse any opinions or the veracity of claims contained within the articles.

Editor: Darlene Cox