
UPDATE FROM THE OFFICE

Canberrans continue to do really well at complying with the public health restrictions and as a result limiting the spread of COVID-19 in the community. This is excellent news, but we all need to remain vigilant, maintain our physical distancing and wash our hands frequently. This weekend we will see further easing of restrictions. This includes the reopening of dog parks and suburban parks, skate parks and playgrounds. Community centres, clubs and halls will also be able to open for small gatherings of up to 10 people at a time., as will cafes and restaurants, with up to 10 diners at any one time. I am particularly looking forward to the reopening of Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and the Woden, Gungahlin and Dickson libraries (from 18 May). The details of the changes are available on the [ACT government website here](#).

While many people will be looking forward to a little more freedom and getting out and about there are others who need to remain cautious and continue to limit their activities. And I have also heard from many people that there is a level of anxiety about what these changes will mean in a couple of weeks in terms of increased number of people with COVID19.

HCCA staff team will continue to work from home for now. We have put in place a range of strategies to help us do our work. All the staff have made the transition to video conferencing for meetings with health services, community organisations and the Health Directorate. We have all reflected on how much time this saves in our days. We have not missed the the rush to get from the office to meeting venues, the stress of negotiating traffic or finding a park. We find we can get much more done in a day. Video conferencing will now be business as usual for us to participate in meetings with other organisations.

This week we held our Quality and Safety Consumer Reference Group meeting over Zoom, and our Health Policy and Research Advisory Committee meeting. I think we are all getting the hang of this now. There are still a few hiccups with the mute button but on the whole people are using the chat function, holding up their hand to comment just like the old days at school. We are in the process of finalising arrangements to transition the Chronic Conditions Seminar Series to online delivery, and details will be in upcoming newsletters.

[COVID-19 Update](#)

[Policy and Research Update](#)

[Health Literacy Update](#)

[Consumer Reference Group Updates](#)

[Items of Interest](#)

[COVID-19 Resources](#)

[Committee Vacancies](#)

HCCA EVENTS

Members' Forum by Zoom

11am - 12pm
Wed 27 May 2020

HCCA Consumer Issues Report Weeks 6 and 7

- [Click link here](#)

Most HCCA events have been cancelled until 30 June 2020 at this stage.

Our **Members Forum on 27 May 2020** will be via Zoom also. A reminder to rsvp if you haven't already done so. It will be a one-hour session with an update from the HCCA team on a few things we are working on.

We have received some positive feedback from members about our coverage of COVID 19 information. Thanks for this feedback. At the beginning of the outbreak I tasked the staff team with keeping across the information that is important to consumers. This includes service changes as well as information about the virus and symptoms. The team has done a great job at keeping across developments and identifying trusted sources of information.

This week we noticed that the [International Association of Patient Organisations](#) (IAPO) promoted the [World Health Organisation](#) (WHO) [App on COVID19](#). The WHO launched the app recently. While it is a new learning app targeted specifically to health workers it may also be of interest to consumers and carers. It provides accurate, extensive, reliable, and timely information on COVID-19. It also provides detailed information and tools addressing key areas of concern for health workers responding to the outbreak. Its main areas of focus include:

- Infection prevention control
- Case management
- Use of personal protective equipment
- Staff safety and health
- Risk communication & community engagement

You can read more about the [WHO app here](#).

A reminder that for the latest information on the COVID-19 outbreak you can look at the WHO website as well as the Commonwealth Department of Health Insert link and the ACT Government COVID19 page insert link. The WHO has a myth buster page that members may be interested in. When I reviewed this recently, I was surprised at the number of myths circulating on how to protect or cure yourself. The site is [here](#).

This week marked International Day of the Nurse. It is celebrated on 12 May, Florence Nightingale's birthday. I want to acknowledge the work of our nurses, midwives and nurse practitioners. They are so essential to good quality, safe health care and make a difference to our experience of care.

*Darlene Cox
Executive Director*

COVID19 UPDATE

Health Issues Centre Consumer Forum - COVIDSafe App and Telehealth

Kate Gorman, Claudia Cresswell and Kathryn Briant participated in a webinar hosted by [Health Issues Centre](#) on 7 May 2020 to discuss the COVIDSafe App and Telehealth. Almost 300 people attended it.

The event gave community representatives of at-risk groups such as the elderly, people with disabilities and co-morbidities – as well as the general community – an opportunity to feed into the discussion. CEO of Health Issues Centre, Danny Vadasz, said 'A message that came through strongly from event participants is the need to involve the community in decision-making that affects them'.

Speakers included Dr Chris Lease discussing the importance of contact tracing in stopping the spread of Covid-19, David Vaile from UNSW's Cyberspace Law and Policy Community talking about the need for informed consent and Associate Professor Charlotte Hespe presenting on the speedy take-up of telehealth by medical practitioners nationwide.

You can read a summary of proceedings [here](#). A video of the plenary session is [linked here](#).

Frequently Asked Questions on Elective Surgery and Procedures

Australian hospitals recommenced elective surgery, investigations and procedures on 27 April 2020, following a National Cabinet decision.

To assist health service organisations, clinicians and consumers, the [Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care](#) (the Commission) has developed guidance on standard and transmission-based infection prevention and control precautions. There are frequently asked questions (FAQs) to support health service organisations and clinicians to implement these requirements, and to help consumers, patients and carers to understand what the changes mean for them.

You can access the new FAQ resources on the Commission's website:

- [FAQs for clinicians on elective surgery](#)
- [FAQs for consumers on elective surgery](#)

For more information, visit the Commission's [COVID-19 page](#). If you have a question, please contact the Commission at: HAI@safetyandquality.gov.au

NPS MedicineWise Podcast - Episode 1: Hydroxychloroquine and COVID-19

A new, regular podcast from [NPS MedicineWise](#) helps health professionals and consumers stay up to date with the latest evidence for medicines, tests and treatments, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this first episode, emerging evidence for the use of hydroxychloroquine during COVID-19, and whether it is actually a 'miracle drug' that will save lives during this pandemic is examined. You can [find it here](#).

BBC Inside Science Podcast

Should the public wear face masks? Did the coronavirus escape from a laboratory in Wuhan?

Advice about whether the public should wear face masks, to protect against infection by the coronavirus, differs around the world. Trisha Greenhalgh, Professor of Primary Care Health Sciences at Oxford University, and William Keevil, microbiologist and Professor of Environmental Healthcare at the University of Southampton answer why there is so little science to inform the policymakers.

And as the COVID-19 virus continues to spread at an alarming rate in the United States, the White House has suggested that the virus originated in the Institute of Virology Laboratory in Wuhan, China and not in the wild where bats are the ultimate suspected source. Conspiracy theorists have been suggesting that there's more going on, such as deliberate genetic manipulation of the viruses, weaponising them, or just unsafe management. You can listen to the [podcast 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 regular reports are [here](#).

POLICY AND RESEARCH UPDATE

Telehealth

After many years of campaigning for broad access to telehealth for consumers, COVID-19 has brought about change. In March 2020 new temporary MBS telehealth items were introduced, with all Medicare eligible Australians able to use these services. At this stage, as part of the COVID-19 response, these telehealth services will be available until 30 September 2020.

Last week, the Consumers' Health Forum (CHF) ran a great webinar on Telehealth in Primary Care during COVID-19. The session was moderated by CHF's Policy Director, Jo Root, who spoke with presenters from physiotherapy, psychology, pharmacy and General Practice.

There was agreement from the health professionals that these rapid changes have presented a range of new challenges and opportunities in the health sector and hope that telehealth would continue past September this year. This will depend on ongoing government funding of the MBS items. It was also clear that while telehealth phone services work well for certain types of consultations, there is great value in video-conferencing. Visual information and interaction tends to provide more opportunity for assessment and feedback, bringing greater value to the consultation. At this point, around 80% of telehealth consults (around 5 million) over the past 2 months have been by phone.

Some other key points to highlight about telehealth from the webinar:

- While telehealth services are becoming widely available, you still have the opportunity to see health practitioners face-to-face.
- Depending on what you need to see your health professional about, a telehealth consultation may not be appropriate.
- If a telehealth consultation is appropriate and you choose to schedule your appointment this way, you may be offered a choice of phone or video – whatever you are most comfortable with.
- Let the practice know if you need an interpreter for your telehealth consultation
- Consumers are encouraged to continue receiving medical care and accessing usual GP services during this time. Measures for COVID-19 safety are in place in health services to reduce the risk of exposure.

For more information, or to watch the full Webinar on COVID19 Telehealth in Primary Care from CHF, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DCfQmV82NHQ>

And a reminder that HCCA also has a [blog post on getting the most from your telehealth \(or face to face\) appointments.](#)

*Kathryn Briant
Policy Officer*

HEALTH LITERACY UPDATE

More on Telehealth

Consulting with your health provider via phone, email and video can be of great benefit to many. It would be a win for consumers if the extension of telehealth is here to stay.

We are discovering more useful resources to help us make the best use of telehealth. [The Australian Government Cooperative Research Centres Program](#) has links to many fact sheets. You can find them [here](#).

Diabetes Health Check

In these unprecedented times, it is essential to put our health first to help us stay well. Reports indicate a significant reduction in regular GP visits, health screening and regular health check-ups especially for people living with a chronic condition or at risk of an undiagnosed chronic condition. Our health services may be operating in a different way such as telehealth, but they are still available.

There are 18,300 people in the ACT living with diabetes and many more who may not know they have diabetes. There is strong evidence that if diabetes is detected early, and appropriate treatment is commenced, most complications can be prevented, and lives saved. There are steps we can take to know if we are at risk.

Step 1 Know the risk factors:

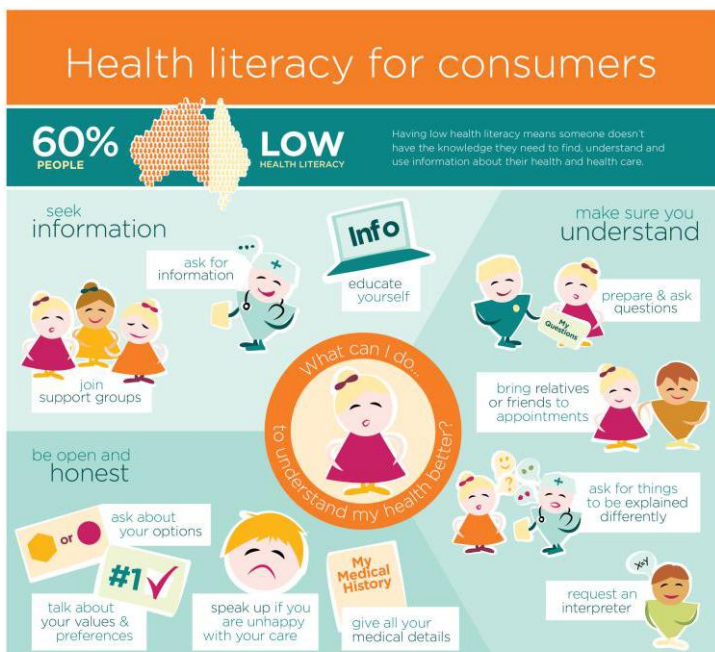
- having a family history of type 2 diabetes or prediabetes
- being above the healthy weight range
- having an inactive lifestyle
- increasing age
- having an aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background
- being from Melanesian, Polynesian, Chinese, southeast Asian, Middle Eastern or Indian background
- having gestational diabetes during pregnancy
- having polycystic ovary syndrome
- taking some medications such as antipsychotic or steroid medicines

Step 2 Measure your risk - complete the online risk assessment [Click Here to access online Diabetes Risk Assessment](#).

Step 3 Talk to your health professional - talk to your GP about your results and the potential need for ongoing tests.

Step 4 Speak to Diabetes NSW & ACT for more assistance:

- Diabetes NSW & ACT can help with tools, resources, education programs, lifestyle support and health professionals
- Diabetes NSW and ACT helpline [1300 342 238](tel:1300342238)
- NDSS helpline [1300 136 588](tel:1300136588)
- for more information call 6248 4500 or visit <https://diabetesnsw.com.au/>



What we Can Do to Understand Our Health

This graphic from the [Australian Commission on Quality and Safety in Healthcare](#) is a simple visual reminder of what we can do to understand our health.

It is available to print off from the Commission's site, but also to order on cardboard if you wanted to place it on the wall at your organisation.

For other interesting health literacy resources see the HCCA website [here](#).

*Claudia Cresswell
Health Literacy Officer*

CONSUMER REFERENCE GROUP REPORTS AND INFORMATION

Quality and Safety - TGA Safety Alert – Miracle Mineral Supplement

The Therapeutic Goods Association (TGA) has published a safety alert to warn consumers about claims relating to Miracle Mineral Supplement (MMS). There is no evidence that MMS can prevent, cure or treat disease, and in particular,

COVID-19. The use of MMS presents serious health risks, and can result in nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea and severe dehydration, which in some cases can result in hospitalisation. Read [more here](#).

ITEMS OF INTEREST

12 May 2020 International Day of the Nurse – Nursing the World to Health Theme

For hundreds of years, nurses and midwives have tirelessly worked to improve the health and well-being of others. To celebrate their invaluable contribution to global health care, the World Health Organization declared 2020 as the **Year of the Nurse & Midwife**. Nurses and midwives play a vital role in providing health services. They are often the first and only point of care in their communities. The world needs 9 million more nurses and midwives if it is to achieve universal health coverage by 2030.

International Day of the Nurse is celebrated around the world on the anniversary of Florence Nightingale's birth. Congratulations to all nurses as they help to "Nurse the World to Health."

HCCA would like to acknowledge the great work of the ACT Nursing and Midwifery Excellence Award winners. You can read about them [here](#).

SURVEY: Looking After Your Health with a Long-Term Condition - COVID-19

If you have one or more long-term health conditions, HCCA would love to hear from you in an online survey. It asks about:

- how you usually look after your health
- any people and organisations that help you to do this
- anything that makes this difficult, and
- any ways that COVID-19 has changed how you look after your health.

You can take part if you have any health condition that lasts more than a year, and means you need ongoing medical care – for example you may take a prescription medication or see a doctor regularly. The survey is part of a HCCA project about consumer and carer experiences of long-term conditions. It's supported by the ACT Health Directorate and is part of our Community Health Literacy Project.

We estimate the survey will take about 15 minutes. You can [find it here](#).

There is also a survey for carers, parents and guardians of someone with a long-term condition [here](#). Please let us know if you'd prefer to complete a paper survey. HCCA will post the survey along with a pre-paid return envelope.

You can also take part in a telephone Zoom or skype conversation about your experience – this will take about 30 minutes and no more than an hour. If you'd like to do this or have any questions about the project please contact Sarah Spiller on 6230 7800 or sarahspiller@hcca.org.au.

The Only Three Numbers You Need to Know in Healthcare

New research from the [Australian Institute of Health Innovation](#) (AIHI) highlights the long-term endemic issues preventing the health system from providing better care to patients. You can find the article in the latest AIHI [Innovate newsletter Issue 2](#), 2020.

While hospitals and the health system are innovating to meet new challenges every day, performance has flatlined. The research points to a three-pronged challenge standing in the way of progress:

- 60% of care on average is in line with evidence- or consensus-based guidelines,
- 30% is some form of waste or of low value, and
- 10% causes harm to patients

An exploration of these issues and strategies for the future are explored by Professors Jeffrey Braithwaite and Johanna Westbrook, AIHI and Professor Paul Glasziou, Bond University.

Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Response to COVID-19

The ACT Government has allocated \$580,000 to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and services to boost the capacity of community-controlled organisations and culturally specific programs during COVID-19.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience a range of vulnerabilities which place them disproportionately at risk during this pandemic, including a greater likelihood of having underlying health conditions.

Funds will also be available for grass roots organisations to support activities that support

connection to culture and mental health. This includes support for funerals and Sorry Business during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA said, “We know Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the experts in recognising and responding to the needs of their community.” This funding complements \$250,000 announced for targeted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and suicide prevention initiatives. You can [read more here](#).

How COVID-19 Spurs the Case for Health Prevention – Health Voices

The post-pandemic era offers fresh impetus to support healthier living. [Issue 26 of Health Voices](#) from the [Consumers’ Health Forum](#), gives insights that pro-wellness policies are paying off in the fight against the virus.

But prevention is an ideal that does not go away, even in the face of the malignancy of COVID-19. Preventive health will have saved many lives affected by COVID-19, and lack of preventive practices has doomed the lives of many thousands of others. You can read more [here](#).

Useful Newsletters

ACTCOSS

- May e-Notice [here](#)
- COVID-19 Update [here](#)

Consumers Health Forum of Australia

- May edition [here](#)

Women with Disabilities ACT

- May edition [here](#)

Public Health Association of Australia

- Latest edition [here](#)

International Alliance of Patients’ organizations

- May news [here](#)

ACT Health COVID-19

- Latest 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

Disability Information Helpline: Ph 1800 643 787 8am-8pm Monday to Friday and 9am-7pm Saturday and Sunday.

The Older Person's Support Line: Ph 1800 171 866.

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.

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 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 ends in June 2021, the new consumer representative will allow a 12-month transition period. The appointment is for three years from June 2020 at the discretion of the Minister for Health, the Hon Greg Hunt MP. There are six meetings/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 karenjames@hcca.org.au to request a letter of support or telephone 6230 7800.

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Consumer Bites is the newsletter of the **Health Care Consumers' Association.**

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