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You may have seen that HCCA has already taken the decision to postpone events. You can see our blog about our [position here](#).

We are meeting with Canberra Health Services on Friday this week to talk about their COVID-19 Plan. We have a range of questions we want to talk through with them. For example, we are interested in the potential impact on elective surgery and outpatient clinics. What about vulnerable people who are at home receiving care (older people, people with disabilities)? Who will care for them when the workforce is compromised by illness? How will health services support carers? How are they managing their workforce? What processes are in place to recall people to professional roles eg, those recently retired, those who may not meet the recency of practice requirements of registration? What about the role of palliative care to provide the best care possible and good end of life care? And, what process will we have to develop an ethical framework around decision making for when the system exceeds ICU capacity and there are hard decisions about who will receive care? For example, if the surge is greater than capacity what criteria will be used to determine who has access to mechanical ventilation etc?

Are there specific questions you have that you are not getting answers to? Please let us know.

While the risk of infection is still relatively low for us in the ACT, we know this situation can change quickly. The public health officials have been very clear in telling us that there will be an exponential increase in infections unless strong, early preventative action is taken. The virus is much more infectious and considerably more dangerous than influenza and poses a high risk for older people and those people who have compromised immune systems and other underlying health issues.

Social distancing means limiting our interactions with others and public health officials are telling us this is an effective way to prevent the exponential transmission of the virus.

You may have seen online and mainstream media discussion of approaches to 'flatten the curve'. Rather than have a spike in the number of infections over a short period of time we are looking to slow the rate of spread of the virus to have a flatter curve.

HCCA EVENTS

All HCCA events have been cancelled until 30 April 2020 at this stage.

HCCA blogs

- [*Preventing Overdiagnosis*](#)
by Kathryn Briant
- [*Current HCCA response to COVID-19*](#)
by Darlene Cox

This would mean that our health services would not be overwhelmed and resources including test kits, medications, and hospital beds will not be used at once. This can lead to fewer infections and fewer deaths.

Steps to take to flatten the curve include washing your hands, avoiding travel to areas where the virus is spreading, staying home if sick and avoiding hosting large gatherings. Here are Covid19 information links you may find useful:

- [ACT Health](#)
- [Department of Health](#)

Last week the [ACT Wellbeing Indicators](#) were released. One of the areas is health. Being healthy and supported with the right care. The Government is committed to the vision that Canberrans have good physical and mental health at every stage of life and can access the services they need to lead healthier lives and manage illness. You can read about the [wellbeing indicators online here](#).

*Darlene Cox
Executive Director*

POLICY AND RESEARCH UPDATE

Thank you to everyone who has provided input on recent policy submissions! Last week we put in our submission to Canberra Health Services on the review of the Draft Consent and Treatment Policy. This week we will provide our feedback to the ACT Health Directorate on the draft Mutual Rights and Responsibilities text. Our latest submissions will be uploaded to the HCCA website soon.

TGA Opioids Workshop Presentations – from 18 Feb 2020

In February the [Therapeutic Goods Administration](#) (TGA) brought together a range of clinical and consumer stakeholders to discuss a coordinated approach to communication and education on the reforms to the regulation of prescription opioid medicines. The ultimate goal of this meeting was to identify potential targeted activities which could be funded to help achieve

a reduction in opioid harms and misuse of opioids, while continuing to maintain access to patients with a clinical need. If you have an interest in this area and would like a copy of the presentations given at this meeting, please contact Kathryn Briant at HCCA on 6230 7800 or kathryn.briant@hcca.org.au

Blog Post (2): Preventing Overdiagnosis Conference (5-7 December 2019)

Late last year three HCCA members attended the Preventing Overdiagnosis Conference (5-7 December 2019) in Sydney: Karin Calford, Russell McGowan and Kathryn Briant. The conference was co-sponsored by the World Health Organization. Wisser Healthcare was a partner organisation and they provided funding to support consumer participation at the conference. Wisser Healthcare is a research collaborative that conducts research that will reduce overdiagnosis and overtreatment in Australia and around the world.

then treated for a disease that won't actually cause them any symptoms, and it can happen for people whose symptoms or life experiences are given a diagnostic label which brings them more harm than good.

In the last issue of Consumer Bites, we linked to Karin Calford's report from the conference – this issue we have posted Kathryn Briant's blog post from this same event [here](#). If you are interested in finding out more about the conference, you can access the program online [here](#). The keynote presentations are available to watch online [here](#).

Overdiagnosis happens when people get a diagnosis they don't need. It can happen when people without symptoms are diagnosed and

*Kathryn Briant
Policy Officer*

HEALTH LITERACY UPDATE

World Hearing Day

World Hearing Day is held on 3 March each year to raise awareness on how to prevent deafness and hearing loss and promote ear and hearing care across the world. It coincides with Hearing Awareness Week in Australia.

It is estimated hearing loss costs Australia \$15 billion a year to the health system and in lost productivity. It affects 70% of people over the age of 70.

Yelin and Claudia attended the Health and Hearing Expo held at the Hellenic Club on 5 March 2020. The key-note speaker outlined a new video phone with teletext that is subsidised by government for people with hearing loss. There were free hearing tests offered and many stalls like ours, with industry and community information.

At right: Yelin Hung (HCCA) and Natalie Smith from Diabetes ACT/NSW at the HCCA stall



National Advance Care Planning Week 23-27 March 2020

National Advance Care Planning Week is an initiative by Advance Care Planning Australia that encourages all Australians, regardless of their age or health status, to make their future health care preferences known.

The initiative challenges people to discuss what living well means to them and to consider who they would want to speak for them, if they were too sick to speak for themselves.

HCCA will continue to offer our seminar “A Conversation for All”, later in the year, to anyone who wants to find out more. The seminar gives an overview of the forms involved, how you can have a conversation with friends and family so they understand your wishes, and who can help you get your plan in place.

Canberra Lung Life Support Group Celebrates 22 years



On 12 March 2020 I attended the Canberra Lung Life Support Group 22 years anniversary celebration. It is a significant milestone for a support group that has been providing not just education, support and advocacy, but a place where people can make lifelong friends.

The celebration was an opportunity to acknowledge the many people who had contributed to the group. HCCA was acknowledged for our support, in training consumer representatives and providing health literacy education.

Claudia Cresswell and Caroline Polak-Scowcroft, long-time member of both Lung Life and HCCA.

*Claudia Cresswell
Health Literacy Officer*

HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE UPDATE

SPIRE Project Request for Tender

On 11 March 2020, the ACT Government announced that two companies, Lend Lease and Multiplex, will progress to the next stage of the tender process for a design and construction contractor for the SPIRE project, the new emergency surgical and critical health care

facility to be built at Canberra Hospital. These companies were shortlisted following an Expression of Interest process undertaken by Major Projects Canberra. It is expected that the successful contractor will be engaged later this year.

ACT Legislative Assembly Inquiry into SPIRE

HCCA lodged a submission to the Standing Committee on Planning and Urban Renewal Inquiry into Planning for the Surgical Procedures, Interventional Radiology and Emergency Centre (SPIRE) and the Canberra Hospital campus and immediate surrounds. Submissions made to the Inquiry are now available on the ACT Legislative Assembly website [here](#).

Public hearings will be held on Tuesday 24 March 2020, from 10.00am-4.00pm. HCCA has been invited to appear before the Committee at 11.30am-12.00pm. Alan Thomas will appear for HCCA. Public hearings are web streamed live from the Legislative Assembly website [here](#).

Opening of Refurbished Haematology and Cancer Ward at Canberra Hospital

The refurbished Ward 14A has opened at Canberra Hospital for haematology and cancer inpatients. The ward includes new medical equipment, more single bedrooms, and day beds in each room for carers to stay if required. A new dining room provides a space for patients and

their families to spend time together and encourages patients to eat. The ward also features additional positive pressure environments to reduce the risk of infection to immune-suppressed patients.

Dickson Community Health Centre Closed for Renovations

The Dickson Community Health Centre is now closed for renovations as work on the new Walk-In Centre is undertaken. The Walk-In Centre will be co-located with the Community Health Centre

along Dickson Place, with the joint complex expected to open to patients later this year.

Expansion of Emergency Department at Calvary Public Hospital

Works to expand the emergency department at Calvary Public Hospital, Bruce are nearly complete. Eight additional beds are now open in the Short Stay Unit, including four equipped for the treatment of children. The unit is designed for patients who are expected to be treated and cared for in less than 24 hours. It allows further investigations to take place for patients who have

come through the emergency department and may need further treatment after their triage and initial assessment.

Another 14 treatment spaces for a 'fast track' service and an expanded triage and reception area will open soon.

*Anne Meuronen
Community Participation Coordinator*

CONSUMER REFERENCE GROUP REPORTS AND INFORMATION

Quality and Safety - COVID-19 Information About the Flu Vaccine, Ibuprofen and Pregnancy

Flu Vaccine

The following advice is based on information from the [Capital Health Network](#) (CHN) in concordance with the advice given by the Chief Medical officer and the National Centre for Immunisation Surveillance. With COVID-19 being a significant health issue facing all of us, having the influenza vaccination is more important than ever. This is because the flu season is imminent. If we succumb to COVID-19, having some protection against the seasonal flu will help. Being unwell with both viruses will reduce our capability to fight the infections and will make recovery much more difficult. Annual vaccination should occur before the onset of each influenza season and particularly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, especially for those with chronic conditions.

CHN advises that this year's flu vaccine will be released in the first week of April. In the ACT flu vaccination is free for:

- people aged 65 years and over
- pregnant women
- all children aged 6 months to under 5 years
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 6 months and over, and
- people aged six months and over with underlying medical conditions such as severe asthma, heart or lung disease, diabetes and/or weakened immune systems.

This means that the vaccine is free for these groups. GPs and pharmacies may charge a consultation fee. You should check this at the time of booking. All other people are strongly advised to have the vaccine when it becomes available. You can find more information on the [ACT Health website here](#).

Ibuprofen

The British Medical Journal (BMJ) has written to advise that scientists and senior doctors have backed claims by France's health minister about the use of Ibuprofen in COVID-19 patients. The advice is that people showing symptoms of covid-19 should use paracetamol (acetaminophen) rather than ibuprofen, a drug they said might exacerbate the condition. There was speculation that this may have been "fake news" but the BMJ has confirmed the advice to not use ibuprofen. You can read the article [here](#).

Pregnancy

There has also been some community concern about the effect (if any) on pregnant women and their babies. The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG) has stated that "at this time, pregnant women do not appear to be more severely unwell if they develop COVID-19 infection than the general population." It is expected the large majority of pregnant women will experience only mild or moderate cold/flu like symptoms. There is no evidence that the virus can pass to the developing baby while you are pregnant (this is called vertical transmission). There is also no evidence that the virus will cause abnormalities in your baby. You can read the message [here](#).

Quality and Safety - National Medicines Policy Review

Are you aware of Australia's National Medicines Policy? It has four key elements:

- timely and affordable access to medicines that people need
- high-quality medicines that are safe and effective
- quality use of medicines (QUM)
- viable and responsible medicines industry

Introduced in 2000, our National Medicines Policy has led to a range of very important policies, procedures, and legislation that support different structures about medicines in Australia. In a recent Australian Prescriber podcast, Professor Andrew McLachlan, Head of School and Dean of Pharmacy at University of Sydney, talks about the upcoming review of the National Medicines Policy, 20 years on. Have a listen or read the [transcript here](#).

e-Health - Artificial Intelligence in Health and Life Sciences

The promise of artificial intelligence (AI) in healthcare and life sciences is profound. It can help physicians and researchers prevent disease, speed recovery and save lives, by unlocking complex and varied data sets to develop new insights. AI can speed genomics processing and make medical image analysis faster and more accurate for personalized treatment. It can also be used to detect and correct massive waste, fraud and abuse in healthcare spending. [This website](#) provides much information on the current and future opportunities in this area.

Health of Older People – ACT Policing Seniors Liaison Officer

Lina Webber is the Seniors Liaison Officer (SLO) in the Community Safety Unit of ACT Policing. She spoke at our Health of Older People CRG meeting in February. The SLO team is dedicated to regularly engaging with members of the senior community to give them information and advice about how to protect themselves and stay safe.

The SLO can get involved with any vulnerable people over 65 years, though exceptions for other vulnerable people are possible. The SLO like to be involved as early as possible where issues are identified. They conduct a lot of home visits of people referred to them through the public hospitals. Their work is not time limited and they can engage for as long as necessary – until confident that the right services are in place.

The SLO is doing more work related to the issue of elder abuse in the ACT. They have developed good relationships with Residential Aged Care Facilities and staff feel confident to report whenever they identify an issue.

They conduct safety house audits and can arrange locks to be put on to create a safe room and ensure communication is possible. They also ensure that the person has information on what to do and who to call in an incident.

The liaison officers do not want to cause an escalation and advocates are important – someone to act on a person's behalf. There can be added complications as vulnerable people are not always clear on the permissions they have given, especially in cases of dementia etc.

There are also cultural and religious issues that often include expectations about finances and who will control them. The multicultural officer (part of the community safety team) can assist in these situations.

The ACT policing seniors site is [here](#). The number to call is ph 5126 9103 and ask for the Community Safety Team (8am-4pm Monday to Friday) or ph 131 444 out of hours.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

COVID-19 Visitor Restrictions for Canberra Health Services

To help slow the spread of COVID-19 and to keep patients and staff safe, Canberra's public health services are limiting the number of visitors and other non-essential people on sites effective immediately. This means:

- all patients must limit their visitors to one person per day
- outpatient clinic patients are not to bring anyone unless absolutely necessary. If they need to bring someone, to limit this to one person

These limitations apply to all Canberra Health Service premises including Canberra Hospital, Calvary Public Hospital, University of Canberra Hospital and Community Health Centres. Private hospitals are also introducing restrictions. Visitors will not be permitted entry if they:

- are unwell with flu-like symptoms
- have been in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case, or
- have been overseas in the last 14 days.

These restrictions may be challenging for families and everyone's situation is different. For exceptional circumstances speak to the nursing team for further advice.

Use of Emergency Departments for Lower Urgency Care: 2015-16 to 2017-18

Some presentations to hospital emergency departments that are for lower urgency care may be avoidable through provision of other appropriate health services in the community. Although the use of emergency departments for this type of care has fallen nationally, there is marked variation across areas.

Understanding who uses emergency care services can inform future health care planning, coordination and delivery to ensure that people receive the right care, in the right place, at the right time. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) report found that in 2017–18, 37% (2.9 million) of ED presentations were for lower urgency care. [Read the report here.](#)

Acacia: Understanding Participation Research Opportunity

Acacia is the ACT Carer Mental Health Research Unit at the [Centre for Mental Health Research](#) at Australian National University. Acacia is currently seeking people with lived experience for research into consumer and carer participation in health policy and services. Taking part in the study will involve a one-hour interview and a 30 minute follow up session. All participants will receive a \$50 gift voucher. To register or find out more please email acacia@anu.edu.au or look at the website [here](#).

Health Issues Centre – Medical Research Survey

[Health Issues Centre](#), the peak body for healthcare consumers in Victoria, is working with Alfred Health on the key research questions consumers would like to see investigated.

The online survey will be conducted using the internationally recognised James Lind Alliance approach. It aims to determine the consumer focus for research into the care and medicines given to patients before, during and after surgery. People with lived experience are particularly encouraged to take part.

The Anaesthesia And Perioperative Care Research Priorities Survey can be found [here](#) and if you would like more information you can call Sophie Wallace or email s.wallace@alfred.org.au

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

21 March 2020 is the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Racist extremist movements based on ideologies that seek to promote populist, nationalist agendas are spreading in various parts of the world. These are fuelling racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, often targeting migrants and refugees as well as

people of African descent. The United Nations' International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is observed to remind people of racial discrimination's negative consequences. It also encourages people to remember their obligation and determination to combat racial discrimination. Find out more [here](#).

Close the Gap Day

19 March 2020 is [National Close the Gap Day](#). On this day, we have an opportunity to send our governments a message that Australians value health equality as a fundamental right for all. The aim is to bring people together to share information, and most importantly, to take meaningful action in support of achieving Indigenous health equality by 2030.

Unfortunately, activities this year have been cancelled due to COVID-19. But spreading the word, collecting pledges and showing your support, will help hold governments to account on their commitment towards health equality for all Australians. Find out more [here](#). You can read the [Close the Gap Report 2020 here](#).

Consultation Open: Draft National Safety & Quality Digital Mental Health Standards

The [Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care](#) (ACSQHC) is conducting an online survey to address safety and quality risks for digital mental health service users. The Commission is seeking feedback on the draft standards from consumers and carers, clinicians, service providers and any other interested stakeholders.

If you would like to participate in the online survey there is a link provided [here](#).

Feedback can be provided by email to DMHS@safetyandquality.gov.au, or by post to Ben Prest, Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, GPO Box 5480, Sydney NSW 2001.

The commission is also running webinars. You can register for these via the link above and find out more information about the consultation process.

Free Online Course on COVID-19

From travel bans to sport shutdowns – coronavirus is changing life as we know it. It's tough to know who to trust – that's why it's vital to receive facts from experts, wherever you are in the world.

FutureLearn have partnered with the [London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine](#) and the UK Public Health Rapid Support Team to offer a new free course on [COVID-19](#).

The online course will be led by top health experts, guiding you through the latest information about coronavirus, examining what it is and how exactly we should respond as citizens – especially with different governments offering different advice. Even if you're not in an at-risk group, this might provide useful information to allay some fears.

Useful Newsletters

ACTCOSS

- March e-Notice [here](#)

Consumers Health Forum of Australia

- COVID-19 edition [here](#)

Women with Disabilities ACT

- March edition [here](#)

Public Health Association of Australia

- March edition [here](#)

Health Consumers NSW

- March edition [here](#)

ACT Health COVID-19

- Latest update [here](#)

UPCOMING HCCA EVENTS

HCCA has taken the decision to stop any face to face events until the end of April 2020 (at this stage). This is in response to the Public Health State of Emergency that has been declared in the ACT. We have written to all of our members to let them know. If you have any questions, please either email us or message via Facebook.

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

ACT Health: <https://www.health.act.gov.au/about-our-health-system/novel-coronavirus-covid-19>

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

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

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

Commonwealth Department of Health: <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/coronavirus-covid-19-news-and-media>

People who are concerned and want further information on the virus can also call the Australian Government's Coronavirus Health Information Line on [1800 020 080](tel:1800020080). The line operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

CONSUMER PARTICIPATION

At this stage, HCCA has cancelled all events that we had planned until 30 April. 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. Should we have further opportunities available for consumer reps to join committees, we will advertise them here, however face-to-face attendance will be postponed until further notice. Consumer representatives can continue to contribute to committee work remotely.

CONSUMER REPRESENTATIVE SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

2020 Choosing Wisely Meeting: Empowering Consumers to Choose Wisely

Choosing Wisely Australia is holding its national meeting in Sydney on 20 May 2020 at the International Convention Centre in Sydney. This meeting offers a platform for Choosing Wisely members and supporters, consumer advocates, health services and other healthcare influencers to engage in discussions, presentations and workshops about empowering consumers and health professionals to change the conversations in our health system for evidence-based care.

The National Meeting will be immediately followed by the [National Medicines Symposium \(NMS\) 2020](#) on 21 May 2020, with the theme *Rising To The Medication Safety Challenge*.

HCCA will sponsor one consumer delegate to this meeting and symposium and is seeking expressions of interest from consumer representatives. Sponsorship includes conference registration, and transport and accommodation costs. HCCA has an expectation that consumer representatives who are sponsored will share their knowledge through contributing a written or spoken report for the benefit of other members and staff. Please note that face to face meetings may be changed to online meetings due to COVID-19.

More information can be found [here](#). Expressions of Interest close on **Friday 27 March 2020**.

OTHER COMMITTEE VACANCIES

NPSMedicineWise Consumer Advisory Group Chair and Consumer Members

[NPSMedicineWise](#) is an independent, non-profit body that uses evidence-based information to improve the quality use of medicines and medical tests to help people achieve better health outcomes. NPSMedicineWise is establishing a Consumer Advisory Group to advise on best practice for consumer and community engagement, and to influence the work of the organisation.

Applications for a chair and members of the Consumer Advisory Group are now open. The chair will be a consumer representative with leadership experience an understanding of the consumer issues involved in the quality use of medicines and medical tests. The members will

be a mix of consumer representatives and consumer engagement experts. The chair and members will initially be appointed for a term of two years. Three face to face meetings are planned each year, with the first scheduled for 27 May 2020. Travel costs and sitting fees will be provided. Please note that face to face meetings may be changed to online meetings due to COVID-19.

Applications close at 5.30pm on **Tuesday 31 March**. Please submit your Expression of Interest via the online form [here](#). For more information please call Bronwyn Walker on (02) 8217 8784 or email Bronwyn.walker@nps.org.au

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Consumer Bites is the fortnightly 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