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## An open letter to Australians

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May 2020

Dear Australia,

### Let's work together to put your health first

COVID-19 caught us by surprise, testing our health system and testing our country in many ways. The good news is that the actions taken to “flatten the curve” and reduce the spread of COVID-19 are working – but now we need to take action to avoid a second wave of health problems.

Understandably, during our lockdown the rates of visits to general practice, allied health professionals and emergency departments have dropped. There has also been a large drop of about 40% in the number of pathology tests being done. These are tests such as blood, urine or tests on body tissue ordered by your healthcare professionals.

While we continue to be careful and take the recommended precautions to protect our community against COVID-19, it's important to look after the other aspects of our healthcare, and Australia's world-class healthcare professionals are here to help you do that. Before COVID-19 struck, we were already concerned that the number of people getting cancer screening tests was too low. We also knew that early detection and monitoring for type 2 diabetes, heart disease and kidney disease were lacking, with large numbers of undiagnosed cases. COVID-19 has made these existing problems even worse.

We don't want to risk trading one health problem for another with Australians missing out on cancer, diabetes, heart or kidney checks because of fear and other barriers caused by COVID-19.

Postponing a visit to a health professional or a pathology test might seem OK, but cancer, diabetes and kidney disease do not stop during COVID-19. We need to avoid delays to ensure any new symptoms get checked and diagnosed quickly, and to ensure we monitor existing conditions.

So, if you have put off a visit to general practice, an allied health professional or a pathology test - don't delay any further. It could save your life.

Telehealth has been expanded to make healthcare easier to access. You can now have consultations with your doctor, pharmacist or other health professionals through video chat or phone calls, and have lifesaving medicines delivered to your home.

Remember, health services are also open to see you in person - safely. Healthcare professionals are taking all the necessary hygiene measures and other precautions to keep you safe when you need to visit in person.

We understand you may have questions about how you can access the care you need safely, we encourage you to contact your health services and ask those questions.

So please get in touch, make that call, or book an appointment today. Cancer, heart disease, diabetes and kidney disease won't wait, so neither should you.

*Signed by:*

*Diabetes Australia, The Heart Foundation, Royal Australian College of General Practice, National Rural Health Alliance, Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association, Australian Diabetes Society, Consumers Health Forum, Allied Health Professions Australia, Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine,*



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