



Professor Brendan Murphy
Chief Medical Officer
Department of Health
Scarborough House
Level 14, Atlantic Street
Woden ACT 2606

BY EMAIL: Brendan.Murphy@health.gov.au

Dear Prof. Murphy

I am writing on behalf of the Catholic hospital network across Australia, specifically regarding strategies to ensure the availability of hospital staff – both clinical and non-clinical – over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in response to the letter from Ms Alison J McMillan, Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer, Commonwealth Department of Health to nurses and midwives, dated 11 March 2020 which provided an update on the COVID-19 outbreak situation in Australia.

The availability of hospital staff is obviously vital to ensure that COVID19-infected people who are critically ill are able to access the care they need, but also for those seeking urgent hospital care for non-COVID19 related health issues.

I recognise that many, if not all, hospitals in Australia are already preparing to engage surge staffing strategies and I refer to the Department's *Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)* and specifically one of the strategic objectives of that Plan, which is to support health systems.

In order to ensure the availability of sufficient hospital staff, as our health system reaches capacity and beyond, we need to consider the social and labour force aspects of their roles.

The closure of schools, should this occur, will obviously be considered and undertaken with the best interests of students and the nation in mind. However, it is worth considering the ramifications of such a decision and the very real problem of frontline hospital staff needing to become full-time carers for their school-aged children. To solve this problem the government should give due consideration to, among other things:

- Encouraging employers and business leaders to give the partners of healthcare workers leave – so they take care of the children instead; and
- keeping schools open with a skeleton staff to provide day care for the children of health workers, like they're doing in Belgium & Norway.



The Catholic system has been collaborating with other organisations across the health system and respective State, Territory and Commonwealth Governments, and we will continue to do so in this fight against COVID-19. I believe the response to this pandemic so far is a true example of the entire health system working together, with primary care and the public and private hospital sectors in lock step. As always, all of our hospitals have responded to this pandemic with care and compassion and we will continue to collaborate with the entire sector to keep COVID19 at bay for as long as possible and provide care where it is needed.

We encourage the Commonwealth and State Government to continue to work with us and we will continue to provide care and health services in any way which will assist our communities.

Please contact Mr James Kemp, Director Health Policy, on 0414 973 573 or jamesk@cha.org.au should you have any queries relating to this letter.

Yours sincerely

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