



The Hon. Greg Hunt MP

Minister for Health

TRANSCRIPT

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DOORSTOP QUEANBEYAN

E&OE...

Topics: Mental Health Funding, Coronavirus Update; Quarantine restrictions; MPs returning to Canberra who participated in BLM protests; Jobkeeper and Jobseeker; New Zealand restrictions; Mental health sessions Medicare subsidised cap.

GREG HUNT:

I'm delighted to announce an additional \$24 million for both an expansion of headspace services in terms of increasing the capacity of 44 facilities around Australia, either through support and funding, \$17.5 million for services, and additional support to reduce waiting times, or \$4 million for capital and over \$2 million for headspace National.

These 44 sites, include here in Queanbeyan, where there will be \$461,000 to improve the services.

In particular, as Auntie Violet said, almost 11 per cent of those who come are Indigenous Australians. And they come to a safe space and a trusting space.

Equally, in Wagga Wagga, where there will be \$1.2 million, that outreach - as Fiona, to something that you and I were discussing - to Tumut, and that will provide outreach services to Tumut, which will expand the services in an area which is very much in need of that additional support.

But whether it's Nowra, or Wollongong, or so many other places in the region, these additional services will help provide a safe space for young Australians.

The other safe space that's important, of course, is each and every home with coronavirus, and I want to say thank you again to Australians who have done a magnificent job over the period since late January when COVID-19 was declared as a disease of human pandemic potential.

What we have seen now is that in the last 24 hours, as the states and territories have made their announcements, on the advice that I've just had from the National Incidence Centre, there have so far been no cases of community transmission.

I just want to repeat that: on the latest advice I have, so far, there have been no cases of community transmission, two cases overseas acquired.

And that explains why our border protections remain so fundamental.

Authorised by Greg Hunt MP, Liberal Party of Australia, Somerville, Victoria.

59 cases in the last seven days. Of those, 69 per cent have been detected through the hotel quarantine or our border protection processes.

So that's an immensely important part of our protection and defence, and that will continue to be the case.

But very good progress as a country so far, and I want to thank and acknowledge Australians.

In terms of our testing, we're now at just over 1.63 million tests. In terms of our tracing, we're continuing to trace down every case, but the number of community cases is reducing, is on trend, and that's an immensely important thing.

And the number of people who've downloaded the COVIDSafe app is now 6.2 million, and that's an extraordinary national achievement.

And then finally, in terms of our distancing. The message from the medical expert panel is even though we're making progress, the distancing is immensely important.

And I know that many Australians will look at some of the protesters on the weekend and say, we need one rule for all and there shouldn't be double standards.

And I agree. And so I want to thank all of those Australians who have done the right thing, who've continued to do the right thing, and our focus is on making sure that people continue their distance, and I want to thank everybody for their work.

Finally, I want to finish on something that Fiona raised with me last week, when we had a community town hall over the telephone with residents from across this region of Eden-Monaro.

In particular, in Jindabyne, they were talking about the need for masks.

We provided many masks. I can announce that we've now received 160 million masks ahead of schedule to the National Medical Stockpile, and we will be allocating a further 5 million masks for primary health.

That includes 2 million to GPs, with a particular focus for rural and regional areas that are short, where they are likely to have an increase in visitor numbers over the coming weeks and months.

And so in particular, regional areas which are likely to see an increase - we've talked about Jindabyne in particular, and this is action in time. \$1.5 million for allied health and \$1.5 million for aged care.

The hospitals have a separate supply line and those supply lines are very strong.

So we're making progress, but as we make progress, we have to be aware mental health is an immensely important part of the health of Australians, and I'm delighted that we've been able to support these 44 centres.

And I'm also delighted to be able to introduce Fiona Kotvojs, who's been a great mental health advocate and great local champion. Fiona?

FIONA KOTVOJS:

Thank you very much. As someone who was a Lifeline counsellor for ten years and a Youthline counsellor for eight years, I believe mental health is of critical importance to our young people and more broadly to our whole community.

Authorised by Greg Hunt MP, Liberal Party of Australia, Somerville, Victoria.

We've all been through the bushfires and COVID-19 and we know mental health is something that gets (inaudible) for each of us. As a person who works in disaster recovery as well, I know that often mental health issues don't emerge until three or four months after crisis, after the trauma.

And now many of those issues are emerging.

So this additional funding for headspace and for young people, and a real focus on mental health more broadly, it's really timely (inaudible).

Can I encourage anyone who has any concerns over their mental health, depression, how they're feeling, please contact Lifeline, contact Beyond Blue, if you're a young person, go and see headspace, don't leave it. Now those issues will be really emerging, and we need to do something.

As we rebuild our communities, I'll be strongly supporting mental health across the whole region.

GREG HUNT:

Happy to take questions. Firstly from those who are here and then Richard and Clare who are on the phone.

JOURNALIST:

Minister, Canberra's first case of COVID in 43 days was a diplomat who was returning from overseas. Diplomats are exempt from the quarantine restrictions. Will the Government review that in light of the fact that this diplomat has come back and now his whole family is in quarantine?

GREG HUNT:

I understand that the medical expert panel are reviewing all cases as they are determined now, and the medical expert panel includes the Chief Health Officer of the ACT.

And so they will look at all of the circumstances, and if the medical expert panel recommends changes, we will adopt them.

JOURNALIST:

We've seen one diplomat already caught breaching self-quarantine. This diplomat wasn't, but we've seen cases of that in the past. Does that strengthen the case of a review in this policy?

GREG HUNT:

The rules apply to everyone – Australian, non-Australian. If they have their feet on Australian soil, they will be expected to adopt the rules and if there are breaches, then there is no question that the authorities will take them up with their home country and they will take them up very, very strongly.

JOURNALIST:

Should MPs returning to Canberra this weekend, who were at protests over the weekend, should they be returning to Canberra? Should they be coming back to parliament?

GREG HUNT:

Well, I'll leave that up to them individually.

What Dr Nick Coatsworth has said, on behalf of the medical expert panel today, is that anyone who was at these protests should self-monitor. If there are any symptoms, they must immediately be tested and self-isolate.

JOURNALIST:

Are you comfortable sharing parliament with MPs who were at protests over the weekend?

Authorised by Greg Hunt MP, Liberal Party of Australia, Somerville, Victoria.

GREG HUNT:

Well, I would say this - the medical expert panel advice; the advice of every chief health officer in the country was absolutely clear - that these gatherings, for the most noble of causes, absolutely for the most noble of causes, these gatherings, like any gathering were a potential health risk.

And as I said on Friday, it was a lottery.

We don't know whether somebody who's infectious was present and we will find out in due course, as to whether or not case numbers grow.

But, this isn't about the cause, the noble of causes and the most understandable. It's about the health protection of Australians and our message was very clear.

And individuals, particularly elected officials, who breached the health advice, will have to explain why they breached that health advice.

JOURNALIST:

Minister just briefly you touched on headspace being important for when we transition out of COVID-19. But how do you think feel it will be for the Government to transition Australia out of the jobseeker and jobkeeper?

GREG HUNT:

Look, we're on a journey as a country; we've been through an unprecedented time, where there's been a global health crisis and a global economic crisis. Australia is at the head of the pack in responding to both of those crises, in terms of our health outcomes.

And our health outcomes have allowed us to seek to return to a better normal, as quickly as possible.

The fact that we are able to lift some of the restrictions, that we are able to lift some of the supports, then these are causes for a real hope and real optimism going forward.

So, what we want to do is to get Australians back to what we call a better normal, recognising that we've had extraordinary success. We still need to be vigilant. But with each day, we're making progress on the health front, which means we can make progress on the economic front.

JOURNALIST:

What does New Zealand moving to level one restrictions overnight mean for the trans-Tasman travel bubble? Have those discussions advanced any further?

GREG HUNT:

Look, Australia is working closely with New Zealand.

Both countries are being cautious and taking their time. Both countries have been very successful.

And so, I would say this - that over the course of the coming period - and I won't put a timeframe - we are working closely with New Zealand, we'll continue to work closely with New Zealand.

We've both been successful and saved lives and protected lives and when the time is right, then we may well be able to have travel between the states in Australia and between Australia and New Zealand. And that's, I think, a very positive thing.

JOURNALIST:

And just quickly on mental health, one of the biggest barriers for young people accessing mental health services is the cost. Many young people say that once they've used their ten Medicare subsidised sessions, they can no longer afford mental health services.

Would you consider increasing that cap beyond the ten?

GREG HUNT:

So there's another medical expert process going on and that's what's called the Medicare Task Force.

The Medicare Task Force is currently reviewing psychological services and we'll be guided by their advice as well. That hasn't finished.

And so, one of the things that they're considering is MVS and the Better Access scheme. So, we'll wait carefully and respond to that positively, once that's complete.

JOURNALIST:

Do you think there's a need for (inaudible)?

GREG HUNT:

Well we're always adding new services and today is about adding new services.

And today, is about adding free support and free services. That's one of the hallmarks of headspace.

And so, we have headspace, we have the work of Beyond Blue, we have our Medicare supports. We've had telehealth for general GP services, as well as psychological and psychiatric services.

We're now at over 13.8 million telehealth services in Australia and a very large percentage of those have been for mental health services and they've provided access to Australians.

And we're looking to keep Telehealth on a permanent basis going forward. So, that will add to the access.

Then I think I will turn now to, Richard.

JOURNALIST:

(Inaudible).

GREG HUNT:

So, the medical expert panel or the AHPPC will be providing advice to the National Cabinet in advance of Friday.

They're going through the considerations in the course of this week and if there is continued progress in flattening the curve, then there's the potential to increase the actions and decrease the restrictions.

So, I am hopeful that over the course of this week we'll continue to see progress.

And each week that goes by, with reduced numbers and a greater flattening of the curve, there's increased potential for, across a range of different activities, reduced restrictions and increased activity, and I think that that's very positive.

Friday is the day, when the National Cabinet will be considering the advice that the medical expert panel's collating this very week.

Clare?

JOURNALIST:

(Inaudible).

GREG HUNT:

Firstly, we know that the protests were a health risk, because the medical expert panel provided medical advice to back up the common sense every Australian understood (inaudible).

Secondly, we'll continue to follow the advice of the medical expert panel, so as they provide advice, they're weighing and reviewing the actions of the weekend.

They are weighing and reviewing the numbers we are receiving. And I have to say, across the country the Chief Health Officers and medical experts were very, very clear, was what large mass gatherings did, is that they created an additional risk.

And I respect the cause, respect the compassion, respect the issues, but we have received an abundance of cautions. We'll be guided by the medical experts and will take on board their best advice and their best knowledge.

And as a country, yes we are proceeding cautiously, but the caution allowed us to flatten the curve and the caution will allow us to safely exit the restrictions we've had.

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