

29 May 2020

Senator Katy Gallagher
Chair
Select Committee on COVID-19

By email to: covid.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator

Re: Inquiry into the Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Select Committee on COVID-19 (the Select Committee).

The RANZCP is the principal organisation representing the medical specialty of psychiatry in Australia and New Zealand and is responsible for training, educating and representing psychiatrists on policy issues. The RANZCP has more than 6700 members, including more than 5000 qualified psychiatrists, and is guided on policy matters by a range of expert committees.

The COVID-19 pandemic and recent bushfires have emphasised the significance of mental health in all aspects of life and particularly in times of collective difficulty. The appointment of Associate Professor Ruth Vine to the position of Deputy Chief Medical Officer for Mental Health is welcomed, and a clear acknowledgment of the importance of mental health for the Australian community.

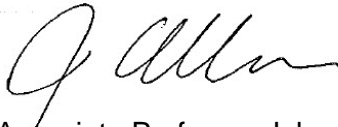
While evidence continues to evolve regarding the impacts of COVID-19, the importance of clear and consistent advice to help people manage the uncertainties in times of emergencies is critical in ensuring good outcomes (1). The Government's commitment to providing updates to the public through consistent and clear messaging based on medical advice plays a key role in helping the community deal with the concerns and uncertainties of the pandemic especially during quarantine.

While the RANZCP notes that it is too early to effectively evaluate the outcomes of the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we would like to acknowledge its responsiveness regarding Medicare Benefits Scheme items to enable the use of telehealth. This response has allowed for better continuity of care to critical mental healthcare services for the community. We anticipate the Government will continue to see benefits for the wider use of appropriate telehealth and will consider enabling this to continue into the future.

The RANZCP welcomes the announcement of the [National Mental Health and Wellbeing Pandemic Response Plan](#) (the Plan) on 15 May 2020. With its priority for timely data and information, the Plan provides a real opportunity to identify further evidence-based interventions to support the mental health of the Australian community during the pandemic and the recovery phase and to achieve positive outcomes.

To discuss any of the issues raised in this letter and submission, please contact Rosie Forster, Executive Manager, Practice, Policy and Partnerships Department via rosie.forster@ranzcp.org or by phone on (03) 9601 4943.

Yours sincerely



Associate Professor John Allan
President

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References

1. Brooks S, Webster R, Smith L, Woodland L, Wessely S, Greenberg N. The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence. *The Lancet*. 2020;395(10227).