

The Hon. Greg Hunt, MP  
Minister for Health  
PO Box 6022, Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

20<sup>th</sup> May 2020

RE: Call for sustained investment in public health

Dear Minister,

I am writing on behalf of the Australasian Epidemiological Association (AEA) to express our unwavering support and appreciation of frontline epidemiologists working to keep Australians safe during the COVID-19 pandemic, and highlight the need for additional resources in public health, not just at this time, but going forward.

We acknowledge the tremendous work being done by dedicated public health epidemiologists, within a culture of integrity and professionalism.

Since January, epidemiologists working in public health have been working under enormous pressure. They have been working extremely long hours under difficult circumstances and making decisions with the best available data and information at the time. Responding to a pandemic is a new experience for many, and this pandemic presents particular problems for epidemiologists because of our unfamiliarity with coronaviruses. As we all learn how to tailor the pandemic response, it is inevitable that occasionally a wrong decision will be made.

We support the Special Commission of Inquiry into the Ruby Princess so that we can all learn from it and reduce the likelihood of it happening again. However, it is concerning that the Inquiry has been an additional source of stress for frontline staff already under considerable pressure. Rather than focus on the decision of a single person, the Special Commission highlights some of the systemic problems that can occur due to underfunding of public health.

Australia needs more investment in public health to build workforce and system capacity for pandemic preparedness and response measures, and to improve our current surveillance systems to allow for rapid detection of cases. Australia would also benefit from additional training and workforce development to strengthen and build a highly skilled epidemiology workforce that can prepare, protect and respond to communicable disease outbreaks in Australia and our region.

We call on the Federal and State Governments to provide long-term, sustained investment in Public Health as an essential service to address a range of acute and chronic health issues and protect the health of all Australians.

Yours faithfully,



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