



Press Release

31 March 2020

Health funds welcome Government's private hospital guarantee

The Australian Government's decision to guarantee the viability and capacity of the private hospital sector will ensure the capability of Australia's world class health system during the COVID-19 pandemic and into the future.

Private Healthcare Australia (PHA) Chief Executive Dr Rachel David said:

"This agreement is a win for all stakeholders and especially Australian consumers. It will secure the jobs of essential health workers in the private sector, provide care for COVID-19 patients alongside the public hospital sector, and ensure category 1 elective surgery continues.

"The decision is critical to managing the short-term pressures on the health system and also the post pandemic wave of elective surgery which will follow."

Dr David said demand for elective surgery was likely to rebound and create a huge bottleneck in the health system in six months and has urged members under financial stress to speak with their health fund before considering whether to downgrade or drop their cover.

"Members with COVID-19 can still elect to be a private patient if they need a choice of doctor. There will still be private admissions for essential surgery, medical and mental health care. Vital treatment for conditions such as heart attacks and acute appendicitis does not stop because of the current situation."

She said Australia's health funds were doing everything possible to ease financial pressure on their members and continue to provide essential health services.

"Health funds are going to extreme lengths to support members, covering out of hospital mental health services and allied health services including critical dental care, and funding vital telehealth services for psychology and physiotherapy.

"This is an extremely stressful time for all Australians and health funds have an important role to play in the very difficult and uncertain time ahead.

"We have postponed the 1 April premium increase, and in addition health funds are targeting financial relief to those most in need because they have lost their jobs, are underemployed or have contracted the virus.

"Funds have given a commitment that any savings resulting from the cancellation of elective surgery and some allied health services will be returned to members," Dr David said.

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COVID-19 What health funds are doing

- The 1 April premium increase has been postponed for at least six months.
- Every single hospital policy – from Basic to Gold – will include full coverage for hospital costs for people affected by COVID-19.
- People experiencing financial hardship as a result of the crisis will be able to access relief from premium costs. Consumers should contact their health fund direct.
- Health funds are covering telehealth services from psychologists from Monday 30 March.
- Health funds will cover telehealth services from other allied health professions where practical and clinically appropriate. Funding for tele-physiotherapy services has already been announced, with more announcements concerning additional professions to be made in the coming days.
- Health funds will continue to provide access to and reimburse emergency dental services and will direct members needing access appropriately.
- We are putting in place special arrangements to allow more hospital in the home services and more remote access services for our members at particular risk [subject to government approval].



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About PHA

Private Healthcare Australia is the peak representative body for Australia's private health insurance industry. PHA represents 24 Australian health funds with a combined membership of over 13 million Australians, or 97% of the sector on membership.

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