



Health Ministers' Meeting (HMM): *Communique* *1 July 2022 at Canberra*

Health Ministers and Health Chief Executives met today in Canberra to discuss priorities for the Australian health system

This was the first meeting of the Health Ministers since the Federal election on 21 May 2022.

The Chair of the Health Ministers' Meeting (HMM), Minister Yvette D'Ath (QLD), warmly welcomed new members of the HMM - Hon Mark Butler, new Commonwealth Minister for Health and Aged Care, Hon Chris Picton, the new Health Minister from South Australia, and Hon Mary-Anne Thomas, the new Victorian Health Minister. She also congratulated existing members Hon Jeremy Rockliff from Tasmania and Hon Natasha Fyles from Northern Territory (not present) on their elevation to Premier and Chief Minister in their respective jurisdictions.

The meeting discussed the challenges facing all State and Territory health systems and the need for urgent work to make it easier for Australians to receive healthcare when and where they need it and to relieve pressure on our hospitals, including in regional, rural and remote areas.

The meeting was an important opportunity to hear from Minister Butler about the incoming Commonwealth Government's reform agenda. Minister Butler advised of his intention to work in close collaboration with States and Territories to improve health outcomes of all Australians. State and Territory Ministers reaffirmed their readiness to begin this engagement as soon as possible. Ministers prioritised engagement between governments around access to urgent care.

Minister Butler highlighted the recent announcement by the Prime Minister, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, of National Cabinet's commissioning of a review to identify practical improvements to the health system to be completed by October 2022 by First Secretaries. Health Ministers welcomed the review, acknowledging the importance of reform across portfolios, including aged care and disability, to ensure the sustainability of Australia's health system. Health Ministers affirmed their commitment to work closely with First Ministers in supporting the review process.

The meeting heard from the Commonwealth Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Dr Sonya Bennett on the challenges currently being experienced over winter of both increased rates of influenza and COVID-19, and the impending BA.4 and 5 wave. Minister Butler reported on the Commonwealth's submission to PBAC to review the eligibility criteria for access to COVID-19 antiviral therapies and all Ministers committed to promoting their availability.

The meeting also discussed the significant challenges and increased demand being experienced in our public hospital systems. Ministers discussed a number of short and long-term measures to ease pressure on hospitals including critical interfaces with primary care, aged care and disability as well as workforce strategy and planning. Discussion also extended to health system funding and financing arrangements.

Ministers committed to holding monthly meetings for the remainder of 2022 to further foster cooperation between their Health agencies and progress their shared work program. They also agreed to work with colleagues in other portfolios to establish mechanisms for collaboration across the disability, aged care and justice sectors.

There was also acknowledgement of the incoming Commonwealth Government's and National Cabinet's commitment to the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* and Closing the Gap on health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Health Ministers confirmed that they will host an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Roundtable in Alice Springs in September.

In a sign of the prioritisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health issues and the commitment to collaboration, Ministers agreed to extend invitations to other relevant Commonwealth and State and Territory Ministers to join them in Alice Springs.

Ministers will join Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders, peak organisations and other stakeholders to hear firsthand of the health risks and hardships faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and to explore how communities, health workers, and governments can work to address longstanding health inequalities. The Roundtable will focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce and building stronger links with other sectors to support health outcomes including housing, justice, education and social services.