



The Hon. Scott Morrison MP

Prime Minister

TRANSCRIPT

PRESS CONFERENCE

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EO&E...

PRIME MINISTER: Good afternoon. I'm joined by Professor Brendan Murphy and the Minister for Health, Greg Hunt and Christine Morgan who heads up the National Mental Health Commission.

It has been two months now, since National Cabinet first met. Indeed, leaders reminded me this morning that leaders have met more often in the past 2 months than around about the last 10 years over the course of dealing with this pandemic. And a lot has been accomplished in that time. And I want to thank the Premiers and Chief Ministers for the way they have come together with the federal government to respond to one of the biggest challenges that our country has seen and certainly in the post-war era. It has been a very difficult time. Australians are hurting right here and right now, as we were reminded so terribly yesterday, with almost 600,000 people having lost jobs. And it has been a National Cabinet that has been very aware of these impacts. And they have made difficult decisions together to protect the health of Australians, but also to protect the livelihoods of Australians as well. During that time, the National Cabinet has fought the virus together and together with Australians we have been flattening that curve very successfully. We have put the supports in place, both the health supports and the economic supports to help Australians through this very difficult time. And indeed, this time last week, we made the decisions to put the framework together, which is now being followed, those three steps, which is reopening Australia and taking those first steps to see Australians get back into those jobs. Now, the task is to really build that confidence and to get that momentum going as we move to the next challenge, which is to reset the Australian economy for growth and to support Australians and their livelihoods well into the future.

Australia's federation has stood up in the last two months in particular, and the Premiers and Chief Ministers have played a great role in taking those steps together. And we've learnt many lessons about how we can work together better in the future. And we will have more to say about that in the weeks and months ahead. Today, the National Cabinet was briefed by Dr Kennedy, the head of Treasury, Dr Lowe,

the head of the Reserve Bank, and Wayne Byres, the head of APRA. It was an opportunity, an important one, to be briefed fully on yesterday's unemployment figures and how it was impacting across the country. It was also an opportunity for Premiers and Chief Ministers and I to reaffirm our commitment to see how we can work together and how we will work together to get those Australians back into jobs. That is the curve we are now working on together.

We noted during that briefing that stability had returned to financial markets. While they are fragile, they remain very functional. We noted that our banking system has stood up well, but we must be conscious that the shock absorbers that are in our system, whether it be in the banking system or indeed in federal supports and other supports, they have limits. They are not endless. They have capacities. And it's essential that as we move forward, that we continue to enable the credit to flow through our banking system to support those businesses who are taking decisions to reopen, to rehire and to move ahead. Some \$220 billion dollars in loan deferrals have already been put in place in our banking system, about two thirds of that in mortgages and one third for small and medium sized enterprises. The banks have also not been enforcing, broadly speaking, covenants, and they've been holding off on re-evaluations and not pursuing recovery actions other than for pre-existing cases. Insolvencies are currently running below average. That's obviously supported by what I've just said in terms of the actions that banks have been taking, but also importantly, one of the significant protections that we put in place as a federal government early on was the protections against actions by creditors and others against enterprises in relation to pursuing them and forcing them into liquidation.

In addition, the super system, we're advised, is responding very well. The superannuation system with some \$11.7 billion in claims it was noted that this was consistent with the Treasury estimate and this was not presenting liquidity issues. The head of APRA has advised us and the industry estimates of what the claims would be have not been realised. Some \$90.1 billion in Australian government securities has been raised since March 20 of this year, \$56.6 billion on bonds and \$33 billion in T-notes. The latest \$19 billion this week at 1 per cent, and again oversubscribed. Markets are seeing that Australia is a country that can be relied upon and that is a good bet in what is a very uncertain time. Our ability to raise this finance in such a difficult time is essential to ensure that we can continue to provide those necessary economic supports and lifeline to the Australian economy. To support the jobs, the households, the payments that are getting people from one day to the next at this difficult time.

It was also noted this morning, and this is hopefully a note of encouragement to our tourism sector, as the borders fall internally and Australians can hopefully soon return to domestic holidays and to move around the country more widely, and particularly with school holidays coming up again in July. We are reminded that the net tourism imports to Australia is just over \$20 billion a year. That means that after you take account of international tourists coming here and Australians going overseas, that there is a net import factor of just over \$20 billion. Now, that's up for grabs for Australian domestic tourism operators. Australians who might otherwise go elsewhere. That is a very large market and that will be targeted. And I had that discussion with the Minister for Tourism this week and to work with Tourism Australia and the other state and territory agencies that are responsible for tourism to focus on seeing that realised as our domestic tourism industry gets back on its feet, which will be an important employer, particularly in regional areas.

But right now, the focus and the advice is rightly from our economic advisers on opening up our economy safely. And I am so pleased that one week down from announcing that three step process that states and territories are overwhelmingly moving through step one and in particular today the Northern Territory Chief Minister was able to pull the first brew. I did ask him why it was such a late opening in Northern

Territory on a day, but I'm sure that will be something celebrated up there in Darwin today. And while there are not, there's not too much to celebrate more broadly as a country with the difficult circumstances we face and particularly with yesterday's unemployment numbers, it is, I think, a welcome sign that we are on the road back. And as businesses and cafes and others are opened up this weekend, those businesses knowing that at just 10 patrons at a time that won't necessarily be a profitable patronage for them to really sustain that, they're backing themselves, they're backing their staff, they're backing their communities and they're backing their country. And I want to commend them for that brave step that they're taking this weekend. Good on you for reopening. And I'm sure your patrons will come in and support you strongly, as well.

On the other side, of course, our economy will look very different, we were advised today, and so it's very important the National Cabinet has reaffirmed its commitment to work together, not just through the pandemic, but to through the economic impacts of that pandemic and put in place the necessary changes we need to make to make Australia's economy stronger again.

Today, also, the National Cabinet agreed some important measures. And Professor Murphy will go through those for you. The reopening of elective surgery. The boom is going up on elective surgery all around the country. That will be done, of course, at the pace that states set. But that will be welcomed, particularly to the private health industry in particular and the jobs that are supported throughout that sector. We also today adopted the National Mental Health and Wellbeing Pandemic Response Plan put together by Christine Morgan, working closely together with the states and territories. And today we are committing \$48.1 million dollars in additional support for the implementation of that plan. And it was particularly encouraging to see that with the advent of telehealth, we are now seeing the number of presentations and consultations occurring for mental health now back to levels that were being experienced, pre-pandemic, half of those being done through the telehealth mechanism. So that is welcome. It's an important reminder to all Australians, of course keep COVID safe, but don't neglect your other health conditions.

Human biosecurity emergency powers have also been extended under the Biosecurity Act, that was noted today and that has been extended from June 17 to September 17. And a process has also been agreed for managing the access to affected remote communities under those powers in partnership with the states and territories and indigenous community leaders in those communities. Yesterday, together with the Minister for Indigenous Australians, Ken Wyatt, I met with leaders of indigenous communities led, of course, by the coalition of Peaks through Pat Turner. And we were able to speak directly to leaders of indigenous communities around the country. And they have done an extraordinary job keeping their indigenous communities safe through this crisis. There are two areas that National Cabinet was most concerned about at the start of this crisis more than any, one was of course, our elderly. And the fact that only 1 per cent or thereabouts of the aged care facilities in this country have been affected by COVID is a tremendous credit to the aged care sector. But the other has been the low level of infection that has occurred in indigenous communities around Australia and to our indigenous leaders in each and every one of those hundreds of communities. Thank you for your leadership. Thank you for keeping your communities, our people together safe.

Brendan?

PROFESSOR BRENDAN MURPHY, CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER: Thanks, PM. I'll be brief because I don't want to detract from the very exciting announcements about mental health. Mental health response is such an

important part of our overall health response to this crisis and I'm truly delighted as the Chief Medical Officer to be able to support the mental health plan.

My general epidemiology update with 7,017 cases at the moment, around about 20 new cases a day over recent days. Still a small number of community acquired cases in some jurisdictions. Just a reminder, this virus is still there at very low levels in the community. And I reiterate the Prime Minister's message as people start to go back to some normal activities and open up, please, please be careful. Please practise all of those new ways of interacting that we've talked about on so many occasions.

National Cabinet was briefed by me today on a range of other measures. We had a discussion on the very rare condition in children, which you've all heard about from overseas, the paediatric multi-system inflammatory syndrome. And I was able to brief them on the fact that this is extremely rare and probably unlikely to be seen in Australia given our very, very low number of infections in children, it's still not clear what the association with the virus is for this condition, but it is extremely rare. We also had a discussion about quarantine periods for returning travellers. I want to make it very clear that there is no, no amount of PCR testing or swab testing that can obviate the need for quarantine. If you are a return traveller from a risk area and a quarantine requirement is in place, having a test done, a swab and a PCR done, just means whether you are positive on that day doesn't mean that you're not incubating the virus and it doesn't mean you can get out of quarantine earlier. So there's been a bit of misinformation around about that, but you can't test your way out of quarantine unfortunately.

We also, as the Prime Minister said, had a discussion on elective surgery. Currently, there are only 50 COVID-related patients in hospitals around Australia. That is a wonderful statistic and only 12 people on ventilators still. Our hospital capacity is around 50 to 60 per cent. We are starting to see some increase with elective surgery relaxations announced a few weeks ago, but there is now pretty good room for further expansion and clearly in those states that are having essentially no cases, they want to go fairly quickly back to full elective activity. Those states that still have some transmission are probably going to take it a bit more gently, but everybody is now heading towards full elective surgery, which is a really important thing, as the PM said and as I've said and Minister Hunt has said on many occasions, a really important thing is that Australians do not neglect their general health issues. If you need to go and see your specialist, you need to go and see your GP, please do so. And if you need to get help with mental health conditions, please, please do so.

So I'll stop there, PM and hand over to Minister Hunt.

THE HON. GREG HUNT MP, MINISTER FOR HEALTH: Thanks very much to the PM, to Brendan, to Christine. The stress of concerns about health, the loneliness of isolation, anxiety about a job, a small business set of finances, the mortgage, all of these pressures which come with the pandemic have created specific mental health challenges. Everyone here will have seen or felt it amongst their own families or friends or circles the pressures that are in place right across Australia. So one of the most important things we can do is to provide mental health support. More broadly, on average, we've been providing \$5.2 billion of mental health support over the course of this year as expected, including a \$730 million package for youth mental health, which was in fact a feature of last year's Budget. This year, already a \$76 million bushfire mental health package, \$64 million for suicide prevention, and a further \$74 million in the first stage of pandemic mental health support.

One of the things, though, which we really wanted to do was to work with the states and territories on a single, unified national pandemic mental Health and wellbeing response plan. And today the Prime

Minister, supported by Christine Morgan, took that plan through National Cabinet with unanimous support. And it was a plan which grew from consultation with the states and territories. I particularly want to thank New South Wales and Victoria for their leadership in conjunction with Christine Morgan and Michael Gardner and others that have helped bring this to the national stage. It's an investment of \$48.1 million from the Commonwealth. Victoria's already announced, I believe, \$19.5 million and other states will make their contributions. Most importantly, though, it covers three areas. First is about support for research and data into what's happening in real time. We've already had some information from Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania. That is heartening and more heartening than we'd expected there. For the first four months there has been no known increase in suicide rates in those three states. We watch very carefully, however, because these things can build up, they can brew, people can dwell and so we want to get ahead of the curve. So that \$7.3 million investment in data is exceptionally important. Secondly, there's \$29.5 million for investment in outreach to vulnerable communities, in particular the elderly, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, indigenous Australians and those who have pre-existing mental health conditions. And then finally, there's \$11.3 million which is going to communication and outreach, \$10.4 million of that will be part of a national campaign to say to Australians, it's okay not to be okay. Unprecedented times, anybody can feel the stress of mental health and to say not only is it okay not to be okay, but there are pathways to help to let everybody know that there is help.

All of this is part of a much broader pandemic health response, where now I can update you that there's over \$8 billion of Commonwealth investment which has been allocated to the full health and mental health needs of the nation. The first \$2.4 billion, which we announced in this very spot with the Prime Minister, over \$1.1 billion for primary health care, including telehealth, where we've now had 9.8 million consultations and over \$500 million paid out. The private hospitals guarantee of \$1.3 billion, \$850 million for aged care and \$2.5 billion for PPE. All of these things have come together as part of our national capacity in response. But today, in particular, is about the National Mental Health and Wellbeing Pandemic Response Plan. And Christine, I want to thank you for your leadership in helping to bring this to you.

PRIME MINISTER: Thank you, Christine.

CHRISTINE MORGAN, CEO NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION: Thank you, Prime Minister. Thank you, Minister Hunt. And thank you, Professor Murphy, for your support. While saying thank you, I really do reach out and I reflect the comments of both the Prime Minister and Minister Hunt that this has been a collective effort. The co-leadership that has been shown by Victoria and New South Wales as we've worked with every one of the eight jurisdictions around Australia plus the Commonwealth has, I think, in and of itself been quite a heartening and encouraging thing. It is a recognition that, as I've said so frequently, mental health is an integral part of each and every one of us and that process has been in and of itself very affirming. I also want to extend my thanks to those whom we consulted with. We, as a Commission, put out with the support of the jurisdictions and tried to engage with people to say if we're responding particularly to the needs of mental health and wellbeing and mental illness and all of those associated issues around the pandemic, what do we need to do? And we heard back some very key things but they resonate actually with the approach that is being taken by this government with respect to mental health from the get go and that is firstly that there is diversity. That we come into the pandemic, we go through the pandemic and will emerge from the pandemic with various ranges of mental illness and mental health issues and mental wellbeing and we need to address that diversity. We also heard very, very strongly about the fact that there are particular vulnerable groups and we need to meet the needs of those vulnerable groups. And we heard about the fact that you can't deal with mental health, you can't,

in fact, deal with mental illness without looking at the context in which we all live and the social consequences.

So this plan reflects that. It understands that. It records that. It says that we do need to look at things such as risky behaviour that so many of us engaging in to try and cope with a pandemic. We need to address those health issues, those health issues associated with substance use and substance abuse, gambling. We must and we will deal with the issues around violence, domestic, family, sexual violence. We spoke not so long ago when we did the mental health package announcement at the end of March about the risks for so many in our community, so many women, so many children, so many others around the reality of violence in the home, violence where they don't feel safe. We have included that in this plan. It belongs with us. And we are committed, absolutely committed, to being there for anybody who needs help and we call it out, reach out. We are there for you. As Minister Hunt referenced, we are always, always on the lookout for those who are at risk of suicide. It is heartening, it is heartening to look at those figures and to say it hasn't got worse. That doesn't mean it couldn't get worse. It doesn't mean that. It means that we are okay at the moment and therefore, we need to not only keep doing what we're doing, but make sure we accelerate it and embed it. And what are we doing and what are we trying to do is stay connected. Because if you are connected with people, you have hope and hope is what we all need.

So what did we look at and do with the plan? Through the lens of that diversity and those groups of vulnerability, we said okay, there are some things that we have actually learned to do quite well over the last six to seven weeks. We have become a bit more agile in our service delivery, more innovative. We've moved to digital. We've moved to telehealth. As the Prime Minister has said, not only are we back to the same levels of engagement with mental health services, we had 957,000 mental health services delivered over the last four weeks. In fact, that is up on last year. We are actually seeing people engage with mental health services. Great. We need more, too. So that is in and of itself an improvement. And as I said before, we understand the social context in which we exist and we're also seeing another really encouraging thing, and that is moving into delivering mental health care in community. But there are gaps and the gaps are what we seek to address with this plan. The first gap, as Minister Hunt has said, is data. We absolutely must come together as a country and see what we can actually do to improve that data collection so that we know not only what is happening, but we can better understand what to expect and we can better move to services where they are needed. That is critical. The second is we have had people disconnect from services. You've heard me say that before and we have had people really challenged with accessing services. So the plan says we must reach into community. That means we need to be where people can access services. We need to be where people live. We need to be where people learn. We need to that be where people work and what they do in their community. So the plan and the jurisdictions have all signed up to say we want to reach into community and that is what the government has committed to in the initiative to announcing today. And thirdly, most importantly, is when you come into a service, whatever way you come into the service, you can access what you actually need. So we are looking here to really say we will be there for people to address their mental health needs. Whether that is if you are challenged by mental illness or you are challenged by mental unwellness or issues we will be there, we will come to you in community, we will significantly improve the data so that we can be much more informed and we will take on the responsibility of ensuring that when you enter our system, the system allows you and we actually help you get to the services you need.

So I'll conclude with saying again, this has been the work of so many and reflects the fact that our mental health needs are integral to all of us. Thank you.

PRIME MINISTER: Thank you, Christine.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, what's your response to President Trump announcing that he's, quote, "changing all the policies and everything for the F-35 project will be made in America."

PRIME MINISTER: We'll see what occurs there as it rolls out. But we have our contracts and arrangements in place for all of those matters. So we'll continue to pursue them in the normal way.

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible] America first slogan, is that something that Australian should perhaps adopt and prioritise Australian jobs?

PRIME MINISTER: Australia will always prioritise Australian jobs and always have and one of the ways we've always done that is we've always had an outward look when it comes to our economic opportunities. Australia is one of the most successful trading nations on earth, and our economic prosperity lies not just here, but continuing to be an open trading nation. This is how we've always succeeded in the past, and Australia will continue to look to its prosperity both here at home and overseas, to ensure that we can prioritise Australian jobs.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, just on the economic briefings today, was there any updates on either forecasts or analysis from Treasury or the RBA on the jobs market or the economy in terms of figures? And also you mentioned the banks have limited capacity to be the shock absorbers. Is that sort of a hint that if the states are too slow to open up, that that could put undue pressure on the banks and help them... are not able to help their customers as much as I'd like to or could?

PRIME MINISTER: On the first point, no, there are no further updates other than to confirm that the estimates that have been provided by Treasury to date, whether it was where we were seeing unemployment heading or indeed the parameter estimates that sat around a number of the programs, they have proved to be quite accurate. And as we said yesterday, I mean, while the headline figure on unemployment was obviously lower than what some might have expected, when you get under the numbers you see something very different. And that is much more tracking along the lines of what Treasury has said. In relation to the second question, John, just remind me again?

JOURNALIST: Just on APRA and the banks.

PRIME MINISTER: Yep, this is something that APRA has advised us. I mean, it's just a simple statement, I think, of the obvious. And that is, while our banks and indeed the federal government has stepped up significantly in the packages of support that have been provided to, the deferral and indeed the waiving in some cases of commitments and also holding back on issues such as recovery operations and things of that nature, that is very welcome. But, you know, our system is finite. Essentially, when it comes to these things and that's why it is so important that we restart our economy and that's why I applaud those many small and medium sized enterprises who are doing just that today. And I know they've been looking forward to doing it. So we we have to be very mindful as we go through this crisis that the clock is ticking when it comes to how far and how much can be done, and that's why it's so urgent that we move safely to reopen our economy and get people back in jobs and and being supported by businesses that are in a stronger economy. And there isn't the same reliance on things like income support or indeed banks having to operate in those sort of unusual arrangements.

JOURNALIST: On income support, would you, would the government consider adjusting the rate of JobKeeper rather than changing the eligibility rules?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, the eligibility rules we've been very clear about from the beginning. And they're important. We've got 6.1 million Australians and more who will be benefiting from the JobKeeper program. And right now, we have some, just about 1.6 million Australians who are being supported by JobSeeker. And I keep stressing how these two income support programs work together and the parameters of JobKeeper were set for a reason. And those parameters and guidelines and, will be maintained for the integrity of that program and for those who are unable to access the support from that program, then the JobSeeker program has also been expanded. Now, we're only 7 weeks now into a 6 month program, and it is very premature, I think, to be making judgments about what possible changes might be made. What we have done with JobKeeper so far is we've dealt with anomalies or issues that have arisen. Let's not forget, as I reminded you the other day, that this is a \$130 billion program which has been able to connect with over 6 million Australians, and that has occurred in just over a month. That is an extraordinary pace of change for a program the likes of this country has, the likes of which the country has never seen before. And so, of course, there'll be some some things to sort out. But so far, the things that have required sorting out have been relatively modest and those changes have been able to be made. There's a review that will be undertaken. It is being undertaken by Treasury as we move into the 30th of June. I'm sure they will identify other issues which should be addressed at that time.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister on mental health, we know that young people and people living outside of the major cities are at risk of suicide, higher risk. And in fact, there have been warnings that they will be the most impacted in the coming years. Was there any conversation in National Cabinet about that? And also, if I may. Was there a push from the states and territories to relax the 10 Medicare subsidised rules under the existing mental health care plans?

PRIME MINISTER: No, but I'll allow Christine to, because Christine joined us today for today's conversation. But I would stress, particularly with the impact of the unemployment statistics we saw yesterday, we're very conscious that that burden of unemployment is disproportionately affecting both women and younger people. And that is why it's so important we move quickly. I mean, one of the points Christine made today in response to issues that were raised is that the more we're able to reopen the economy, that's also good for the mental health of young people to provide that hope and that opportunity and to provide some certainty in what is otherwise a very difficult situation.

Christine?

CHRISTINE MORGAN: Thank you, Prime Minister, and really good question, because we do need to be very careful. So within within the constraints of saying that, I think any conversation about our suicide risk for any Australian needs to be very carefully managed as we go through because we want to actually concentrate on what can we do to ensure it doesn't happen. So was it, was it an issue? Absolutely it's an issue. It's an issue every conversation that I and others have when it comes to looking at the mental health and wellbeing of Australians as we go through Covid-19. So it is of great concern, as I say, the issue is very much about saying how do we stay ahead? How do we try and ensure that those connections are there? How can we try and ensure that we reach people? Now, ReachOut has just, we've looked at their figures because they are a place where young people go and particularly for rural, regional, remote areas where they need to access services which they can't do face to face. And a young person is looking for something. It's been over a 50 per cent increase in young people accessing reach out services and looking at what's there. So we know that young people are concerned. We know that this is impacting on them and we know the risks. We do know the risks. But our challenge is to make sure that we have open access for them to look for help, that, as the Minister has said, the fact we will have a comms campaign which will

really seek to normalise help-seeking behaviour, that's something we've really got to get to and then we'll make sure that we connect with them. All of those will be critical.

JOURNALIST: Thank you, just following on from Jen's question regarding the President of America threatening to pull the manufacturing work out of Australia. Is that any different to what China is doing in regards to the agricultural sector? And secondly, Premier Mark McGowan has said he'd be happy to pick up the phone and call some of his good relations in China to help smooth over the relationship between Australia and China. Have you taken him up on that? And are you planning to?

PRIME MINISTER: Look on the first issue, we have our contracts and our arrangements in place as suppliers into the programs, and we will continue to pursue those contracts as they've been set out. And so I would caution against getting too far ahead of oneself when it comes to reading in, into the statements that have been made. When it comes to our relationship with China, it is built on mutual benefit and we have a comprehensive strategic partnership which we've formed. And within that partnership, there are issues that need to be addressed from time to time. And the issues around beef and barley are those matters. And they've been, particularly on the barley issue, been running for some time. And we always welcome the involvement of all those who are directly involved in these sectors. And and and I have no doubt that Premier McGowan would would pursue that as he sees appropriate. And I've always been aware of those arrangements and Premiers can always take those steps. But as far as the Commonwealth government is doing, we're doing that through the channels that we have available. But I'd stress again that what the Australian government is doing is completely unremarkable. We are standing our ground on our values and the things that we know are always important. I'm not aware if there are things that Australia has decisions that we've taken in our national interest, then they are regularly raised in the discussions that I have with Chinese leaders, particularly Premier Li Keqiang who I've had several meetings with and even when I've engaged with with President Xi, and we'll continue to do that in good faith. And we'll do that, though, always standing by the values and the positions that we've consistently held. One of the most important things about our approach to the relationship, is we're always consistent, we're always consistent. We draw very clear lines about things that are very important to us, as does the Chinese government. And we respect their lines as we expect our lines to be respected, whether it's on our foreign investment rules or our rules around technology, our rules regarding human rights and things of that nature. I don't think any Australian would want us to compromise on those important things. And those things are not to be traded ever. Now, our government is very clear about these things and we will always continue to be clear. And these are not things to be traded.

JOURNALIST: [inaudible] 7.6 million people in Australia right now being effectively paid by the government through the JobSeeker and the JobKeeper program, this morning your Home Affairs Minister, Peter Dutton, says that if the government can help more people through the JobKeeper program, it will. Given you've said that you don't want extend the parameters for the eligibility, are you now considering extending it beyond September? And can I ask you just on China in relation to what you mentioned before. Do you endorse George Christensen writing a letter to the ambassador of China, asking him to appear before a parliamentary committee?

PRIME MINISTER: Look, I don't involve myself in the activities of parliamentary committees. They are sovereign in their own right and they conduct their own activities. It would be very inappropriate for me to do so. And I wouldn't, nor would I pass commentary on it. In relation to the other matter, though, that you've raised, and you just might want to remind me again?

JOURNALIST: Minister Dutton?

PRIME MINISTER: What what Peter's talking about is exactly the response I gave before. This is a demand driven program. Now, we estimated some 6 million Australians would be supported by this program. It is now actually over 6.1, in fact, figures I have before me this morning, are 6,134,874. That's just a couple of days ago. So we've already exceeded what those estimates are and it's a demand driven program, and within the rules that are set out for the program, we will be supporting as many people as we possibly can and indeed, as the record shows, we are. And the timetable of the program has been well set out, we're only seven weeks into that timeframe. And so it would be very speculative to be considering anything other than the timeframe that has been set out.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, much of the hope for the world in relation to beating this virus relies on the creation and widespread administration of a vaccine. Given the level of misinformation currently circulating on the Internet and social media around Australia, anti-vaxxer material as well as conspiracy theories, what can the government do to counteract this? And how concerning is this for you and the health officials?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, first of all, I think Australians are very sensible and I think they tend to discount those sorts of conspiracy theories when they see them. I know that the Chief Medical Officer has assisted in discouraging people from some of the most extreme of those, but they're I think, pretty self apparent. Of course, we seek to deal with disinformation and these sorts of things. But the simple question is, sorry, the simple answer is this is to get the official information then there is an Australian government COVIDSafe app which enables you to get all of that information. There is also a WhatsApp and Facebook messaging services which actually enable you to get the right information. The health.gov.au website also does the same thing and all of the information communications that we are putting out, which I'm sure everyone would agree have been quite extensive through all the various platforms that are there. They all refer to those official forms of advice and that is very important. And people should get their information from those official forms of advice and they should talk to their doctor. And that's why we provided for telehealth, which enables them to do that. But I don't know if Greg or Brendan. Do you want to add to that?

MINISTER HUNT: I'll just add very briefly, the latest figures that I have is that our national vaccination rates, I think for the first quarter remained at almost 95 per cent. And so they're at or about record levels. So Australians are overwhelmingly doing the right thing with vaccination. And if this pandemic teaches us anything, it's, where vaccinations are available we should be using vaccinations. And we've had extensive campaigns and we'll continue to have campaigns because the message is very simple. Vaccinations save lives and protect lives.

JOURNALIST: Can I ask Ms Morgan, a question just about the suicide data. We had a burst of publicity a few days ago about some modelling on projected suicide rates as a result of the pandemic. I wonder if you could comment in light of your real time data on that modelling, how worthwhile that is. And secondly, I think that in Japan, they've actually seen suicides go down. What do you make of that?

CHRISTINE MORGAN: Thank you for that question. I found that really interesting when I saw that last night, that in Japan, the figure actually says that in April, compared to the same period last year, suicide rates are down 20 per cent. Now, what's really interesting there and it goes to your question of the value of modelling. Easy answer is all modelling is really important. And I'd take my hat off and I respect and I encourage and endorse the work of quite a few of our researchers around Australia in our institutions. They are doing fantastic work in addition to the work of Professor McGorry and Professor Hickie, we have

the work of Professor Christensen, the work of Professor Maree Teeson and many others who are looking at, what do we know and how can we try and work towards this. I think one of the most important things we need to show as we look at this and this is where some of this investment will go, is we need to bring the expertise not only into the modelling itself. That's an expertise. It's actually into the underlying assumptions. It's actually into what are those things, and that's where we need our mental health experts coming together and saying, what are the risk factors for sure? We need to know those. We need to know how to reduce the risk factors. But we also need to look at the protective factors. And a question, a live question is, is there a protective component in what we are finding, which has been so challenging for so many that maybe there's a silver lining. We have stopped. We have connected. We've been at home. We are in communication with people. We don't know the answer, but that's really important. So the fundamental principle of data and modelling. Absolutely. We need to get that. We need to get strong. We need the best brains in Australia working on it collectively. We need the best brains in Australia looking at what are all of the assumptions we must look at. We need to look at, if I can say, we need to look at data on the impact of Covid-19. We need to look at the impact of our own wellbeing and population rates of wellbeing and distress. We need to look at what is happening on social and economic factors. We need to look at what is happening with risky behaviours and we need to look at data on the prevalence of mental disorders, that combined, combined would give us the modelling we need.

JOURNALIST: Just in relation to childcare, your free childcare pledge to parents obviously expires on June 28. You know the surveys in, the reviews in. Will you be extending that? And what's your thoughts on the call of Early Childhood Australia to offer parents two days of childcare free a week permanently?

PRIME MINISTER: Well the Education Minister is currently considering the program beyond its current expiry, and it was put in place as a temporary measure. And as you'll recall, it was effectively suspending the normal payment arrangements and subsidy arrangements that had been in place and moved to a different model for a period of time to give a certainty of income to those facilities to enable them to operate, which combined with the JobKeeper payment, enable them to do just that. But that is not a sustainable model for how the child care sector should work, and nor was it intended to be. And so at this point, no final decision has been made on those issues. But the intention was always to return to the payment arrangements and subsidy arrangements that had been put in place prior to those things coming into effect.

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible]

PRIME MINISTER: Sorry?

JOURNALIST: Do you believe or not there is a link between China increasing imports of US barley at the same time that they go and threaten restrictions on our exports of barley to China?

PRIME MINISTER: No. Thank you.

[END]

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