

CCHQ 2022

STRONG ECONOMY. STRONGER FUTURE.

5 May 2022

Mr Heath Paynter
Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations
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Dear Mr. Paynter

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the views of the Coalition on important issues facing the Association. A response to your questions is attached.

The last two years have been tough for our country.

Despite the setbacks, Australia's economic recovery is leading the world.

Unemployment is at 4%, the equal lowest in 48 years. And the recent Budget included the biggest turnaround in our finances in over 70 years.

There's much more to be done. To build a stronger future, our plan will:

1. Deliver more jobs and working towards unemployment below 4%.
2. Deliver tax relief for workers and small businesses.
3. Invest in roads, rail, water infrastructure and renewable energy technology.
4. Make record investments in health and other essential services.
5. Invest in stronger defence, security and borders.

This election provides a clear choice, with real consequences for Australia.

The alternative at this election is Anthony Albanese and Labor. Labor would weaken our economy and put Australia's recovery at risk. Now is not the time to change course.

Thank you for communicating our response to your members.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Hirst
Federal Director

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Authorised by Andrew Hirst, Liberal Party of Australia, Caretaker & Member, 565 Barton ACT 2600



INATIONALS
for Regional Australia

MORRISON GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION OF AIDS ORGANISATIONS (AFAO)

HIV in Australia

The Morrison Government has invested \$45.4 million to support the implementation of the National Blood Borne Virus (BBV) and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) Strategies (2018-2022) since 2018. This investment by the Morrison Government is the greatest increase in funding to prevent, diagnose and treat STIs and BBVs in at least two decades. Our Government's record support is improving our collective efforts to prevent and address the impact of BBVs and STIs.

This funding has supported national awareness and prevention strategies to reduce the impact of BBVs, such as HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C, and STIs, with a specific focus on syphilis, gonorrhoea, and chlamydia; projects that improve diagnosis and treatment options; and health professional and community education. The Morrison Government funding has also provided targeted assistance to diverse and vulnerable populations, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

The Morrison Government 2022-2023 Budget committed a further \$8.6 million to support key organisations to continue programs that aim to eliminate HIV, viral hepatitis, and STIs as public health threats by 2030, through the implementation of five National Blood Borne Viruses and STI Strategies 2018-2022. Our Government's approach to funding and implementing these strategies will continue to include an ongoing commitment to principles of partnership, harm reduction and a community lead response.

The Morrison Government will continue to work closely with the community to address stigma and discrimination and improving quality of life, with a particular focus on actions to address the stigma that leads to delays or prevents people from seeking diagnosis, treatment, and ongoing support. This approach will inform the Morrison Government's discussions with groups such as AFAO regarding the development of national BBV and STI strategies for 2023 and beyond.

A re-elected Morrison Government will commit to develop and implement new national strategies on HIV, blood-borne viruses and STIs for the period from 2023 and seek to drive further reductions in HIV transmission through community-led campaigns and peer education.

The Morrison Government has taken many critical steps in helping to end the transmission of HIV infection in Australia, including a \$180 million investment to list medicines tenofovir with emtricitabine for Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Schedule (PBS) in 2018. In the first two years since pre-exposure prophylaxis was listed on the PBS, the number of HIV notifications in Australia have decreased by 25 per cent, from 841 in 2018 to 633 in 2020. The Morrison Government will continue to follow the medical advice in further expanding access to this treatment through the PBS.

From 1 April 2022, Vocabria® (cabotegravir) and Cabenuva® (cabotegravir and rilpivirine injections) are listed on the PBS for the first time for the management of HIV infection, benefitting more than 9,000 Australians each year, who without subsidy may pay more than \$17,000 a year for treatment.

In 2021, the Morrison Government committed more than \$39 million over 5 years to support people living with HIV in Australia, who are not eligible for Medicare, to access the treatment they need. This investment will benefit an estimated 1,000 people currently living with HIV in Australia each year, providing access to appropriate and equitable HIV treatment and care.

Our Government aims to make it easier for Australians to give blood, and is committed to providing high-quality, safe, secure and affordable supply of blood and blood products to meet the needs of Australian patients. Blood donor deferral policies are risk based, drawing on the most current scientific evidence and consistent with international approaches.

Any proposed changes to donor deferral periods by Lifeblood will be considered by the Therapeutic Goods Administration as they are received. The safety and wellbeing of both blood donors and recipients of blood products is foremost in decision making under the national blood arrangements.

In 2020, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and state and Federal governments approved a Lifeblood submission to reduce the donation postponement for donors with a higher sexual activity-based risk from 12 to three months, since the last sexual contact. This change was implemented in early 2021. The TGA continues to regularly engage with LifeBlood regarding the rules and regulations surrounding blood donations in Australia.

Primary Care

Since the Coalition came into government in 2013, bulk-billing rates have continued to rise to record levels. This means that more Australians than ever can visit their doctor free of charge.

In Labor's last year in Government, bulk billing rates were at 82 per cent. Since then, bulk billing rates have risen to 88.8 per cent (2020-21 financial year), which is 6.8 percentage points higher than when Labor was last in Government. This means that under the Morrison Government nearly nine in ten visits to the doctor are free.

Australia has a health system that is the envy of most other nations. Working with the Morrison Government, primary health care services have helped to deliver some of the best health outcomes in the world and have been at the forefront of our COVID response.

The Morrison Government will continue to build on this record, and the Morrison Government's [Future focused primary health care: Australia's Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan 2022-2032](#) will continue to deliver even better outcomes for Australian people, health care providers and the health care system. The Primary Health Care Plan 10 Year Plan will support primary health care providers to embrace other advances: in telehealth; in digital

health; and in other health care technologies, including point of care testing, genomics and pharmacogenomics and precision medicine.

Better access for LGBTIQ+ people is a key foundation for reform under [Australia's Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan](#), noting that LGBTIQ+ people can face barriers and discrimination in accessing appropriate health care and continue to suffer poorer health outcomes than other Australians on several indicators. The Coalition Government has responded to the needs of LGBTIQ+ people across many areas of the health system and [Australia's Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan](#) provides a framework for building on this work in consultation with the LGBTIQ+ community.

[Australia's Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan](#) supports reform and investment in primary health care over time, to ensure any funding and policy changes deliver real improvements in patient care and outcomes. Included in this investment is \$6.2 billion in the primary health care response for COVID-19, recognising the integral role GPs have played in Australia's response to the pandemic; \$106 million to support permanent telehealth services over the next four years; and an additional \$3.6 billion to strengthen primary care, announced through successive Budgets over the 2018-19 to 2021-22 period.

The Morrison Government has also worked to assist those living with blood borne viruses and STI's by introducing and implementing exemptions to the rules surrounding telehealth consultations.

Specific telehealth items have been introduced by the Morrison Government to allow for Medicare benefits to be paid for health care services relating to blood borne viruses, sexual or reproductive health without the requirement for the patient to have an established clinical relationship with a doctor (i.e. have seen their GP face to face at least once in the previous 12 months).

This measure enables patients to access medical services where there may be barriers due to privacy or location. For example, patients in rural areas may find it difficult to access specialised treatment for their condition in their local area, or a patient may feel uncomfortable discussing their concerns with their regular GP due to personal or privacy reasons.

The Morrison Government has delivered telehealth services that assist patients in accessing medical treatment that they may have otherwise not been able to, and ensures they receive the support they need.

Our Communities Abroad

The Morrison Government recognises the enormous contribution the Global Fund has made and continues to make to fighting AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, and to strengthening health systems, across the Indo-Pacific and world-wide.

In our most recent budget, the Morrison Government increased funding for global health programs from \$113.5 million to \$190.5 million, a \$77 million increase. This includes a \$57 million increase to our funding to the Global Fund, to deliver on Prime Minister Morrison's October 2019 pledge of \$242 million in funding by 31 December 2022.

The Global Fund's seventh replenishment is due to be held in late 2022 and a Morrison Government would make a funding pledge closer to the time. The Morrison Government remains absolutely committed to the Global Fund as a critical partner in the fight against communicable diseases.

The Morrison Government is committed to working closely with communities across Asia and the Pacific to support their responses to HIV.

The Morrison Government will support Global Fund's own efforts to strengthen community responses. Our Government will also continue HIV-related support for countries in our region through the Health Security Initiative for the Indo-Pacific, to which the Government has recently made a further five-year, \$375 million commitment.

Finally, the Morrison Government will continue community level support through relevant bilateral health programs – in recent years Australia has contributed nearly \$1 billion in Official Development Assistance per annum to health-related programs.

Australian HIV organisations, including AFAO, have long been recognised as global leaders in the fight against HIV.

Australian medical research institutions have also made critical contributions to understanding and addressing HIV in our region. The Coalition Government's Health Security Initiative for the Indo-Pacific continues to support this work.

Through Global Fund-managed programs, and where relevant to bilateral health programs, the Coalition Government remains committed to ensuring Australian expertise is available to support countries in our region.

Social inclusion remains a priority of the Morrison Government's human rights engagement internationally. Coalition governments consistently champion equal rights and an end to violence and discrimination against LGBTI persons, including through our diplomatic network and in key United Nations forums.

In the Indo-Pacific, the Morrison Government continues to work with UNAIDS, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, to improve access to HIV prevention and testing services for vulnerable populations, including LGBTIQ+ persons.

The Morrison Government 2022-23 Budget included \$1 million over 5 years from 2022-23 to establish a Human Rights Advocacy Program to provide grants of up to \$100,000 to human-rights focused organisations to advance Australia's human rights priorities.