



The Hon Greg Hunt MP
Minister for Health and Aging

Senator Katy Gallagher
Chair of the Senate Select Committee on COVID-19
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
Email:

27 April 2021

Dear Senator

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Greg Hunt', written over the word 'Senator'.

The government understands the important scrutiny function that the Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 has performed throughout the pandemic. Parliamentary oversight is an essential part of the successful response to a crisis in a liberal democracy.

That's why the government has ensured full cooperation with the committee from government departments and agencies, including by providing senior officials involved in the key decisions throughout the crisis to appear before the committee. Officials from the Department of Health have appeared 13 times before the committee. The government has also responded to a significant volume of questions on notice – almost 2,000 have been answered already. This is in addition to the many briefings offered to the Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Ministers.

While the government has gone to great lengths to facilitate this scrutiny function, it does consume a significant amount of time of officials that can then not be spent responding to the crisis. We must balance the need for scrutiny with the first duty of the government, protecting the health and wellbeing of Australians.

I am concerned that recent demands on the Department of Health are detracting too much from their daily responsibilities. In particular, two hearings with senior officials in less than two weeks is a significant commitment of time taken away from their focus on the vaccine rollout which is crucial to the health and prosperity of Australians.

Given that Senators also had access to officials in March for Senate estimates and will again in May, I ask the committee to be more mindful of the impact of its demands at a crucial time for our country.

Yours sincerely

Greg Hunt
CC: Deputy Chair; Committee Secretariat