



Australian Government

Department of Health

Acting Secretary

Senator Katy Gallagher
Chair
Senate Select Committee on COVID-19
Parliament house
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Gallagher

Thank you for your letter of 19 January 2022 regarding the Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 (the Committee) scheduled for 21 January 2022.

I continue to recognise the importance of accountability to the Senate, including scrutiny of the Australian Government's COVID-19 response. I note there is a hearing scheduled by the Committee with the Minister, the Honourable Richard Colbeck MP, on 25 January 2022, whereby the Minister has requested the Department's support to attend as witnesses.

As you can appreciate, the impact for the Department to appear at two Committee hearings within a week is considerable on our work to support the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The diversion of resources would significantly impact critical work within the department, as key witnesses appearing at the committee are essential to a rapid, effective response in the current environment. Departmental staff are working around the clock to support public health and other policy responses in rapidly moving circumstances.

I am proposing rescheduling the Department's appearance to the Committee from the 21st of January to the 25th of January. The Department will remain available to answer additional questions the Committee may have following the Ministers appearance. I can confirm the Department is available for a total of five hours (until 5.30pm) to continue providing evidence to the Committee on 25 January 2022.

I would be grateful if you would consider rescheduling the Department's appearance from the 21st of January, to the 25th of January 2022. I greatly appreciate your consideration of this matter.

Yours sincerely

Penny Shakespeare

19 January 2022