The Hon. Greg Hunt MP
Minister for Health
PO Box 6022,
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

8 April 2020

Dear Minister Hunt,

RE: Support for global COVID-19 pool

The Public Health Association of Australia writes to urge the Australian Government to support Costa Rica’s proposal to create a global pool for rights on data, knowledge and technologies that can be of use for the prevention, detection and treatment of COVID-19.

Such a pool would enable competitive and accelerated production of the necessary COVID-19 technologies such as potential vaccines and treatment agents, and expand our capacity to meet the need for affordable products for all Australians, and for people around the world, regardless of their income capacity. The main idea behind a COVID-19 pool is that it would enable “non-exclusive” licensing of the rights of a product or technique to others, such as researchers and producers.

This will ease the transition to equitable global distribution and help avoid situations where monopolies on urgently needed technologies such as diagnostics, treatments and vaccines, prevent them from reaching those who are most in need.

Other governments have already found that holding on to exclusive rights for the production of resources in the fight against COVID-19 will not lead to the desired outcome. At the time of writing, we understand that Chile, Israel, Canada and Germany have already indicated that they will use compulsory licensing, if necessary, to lift patent exclusivity. We believe that exclusive rights are not the solution in times of a pandemic, and compulsory licenses, while very important tools for promoting access, are relevant only for patents. Therefore, a COVID-19 pool is necessary.

We suggest that those who fund research and development or buy innovative products, be they private or public sector, should be called upon to share knowledge and technology can save the most lives in this international emergency. That is why we recommend that Australia follows Costa Rica and, in collaboration with the WHO, creates a global pool for rights on data, knowledge and technologies that can be of use in the prevention, detection and treatment of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We ask that this matter be referred to the AHPPC for consideration to ensure pharmaceutical monopolies do not inadvertently prevent the rapid distribution of COVID-19 technologies.

Yours sincerely,

Terry Slevin
Chief Executive Officer
Public Health Association of Australia

Deborah Gleeson
PHAA Convenor
Political Economy of Health Special Interest Group