

**The Hon. Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister of Australia
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600**

Copy to: The National Cabinet

Dear Prime Minister

Re - Charities seeking to work with government on critical COVID-19 responses

We write to you in our role as Chairs of the [Charities Crisis Cabinet](#) (CCC). The CCC was formed in response to COVID-19 and its impact across the broad charities sector. Charities play a critical role in supporting and rebuilding both our communities and our economy.

Charities across Australia have greatly appreciated the increased level of support they have received during the pandemic. For many charities, JobKeeper, increased funding for emergency relief and other initiatives, increased flexibility in the administration of government grants and supporting capacity building to adapt including with digital transformation grants have all played a critical role in enabling charities to continue serving their communities. In many cases, government support has enabled charities to survive through very challenging times.

As we again seek to push through the current challenges of the pandemic and provide vital services to communities in need across Australia, there are a number of areas where many charities would appreciate some acknowledgement of our work serving our communities, and a commitment from all governments to support our endeavours.

As you are no doubt aware, many charities are currently struggling to maintain staffing levels, to access Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs), and to access affordable PPE for front-line workers. These are not small issues and are having a direct impact on the capacity of charities to offer services to communities in need right across Australia.

Making RATs freely available to charities would greatly alleviate financial and staffing pressures on many front-line service charities.

Charities could be doing more to support their communities, but the lack of flexibility in critical program areas like Commonwealth funded food support and emergency relief has meant that thousands of charities have been excluded from the program despite having to provide food to communities in need. Greater flexibility and less centralised command and control approaches in the application of government support programs would enable charities to be more effective in responding to the needs of their communities.

Volunteers have played a remarkable role throughout the pandemic, but the lack of integration of volunteers in workplace planning within our pandemic response has created uncertainty around issues such as access to vaccines, tests, and PPE where staff are often prioritised over volunteers.

Allowing overseas students to work longer hours in charities without breaching their Visa conditions (as is the case now in agriculture) would help alleviate the critical workforce issues.

Charities large and small are a critical part of Australia's economic and social infrastructure, especially in times of emergency or crisis. You have previously recognised this role in some of the important measures put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic, and while charities remain committed, the levels of support now available to charities has decreased significantly. At the same time charities continue to service high demand in vulnerable communities in challenging circumstances.

As you frame policies to promote a more open, safe and productive community, charities and not-for-profits want to be part of the solution, part of rebuilding our communities and boosting our economy.

We hope you will continue to acknowledge our role and support us in our work to strengthen Australian communities through this pandemic and into the future.

We are available at any time to discuss any of the issues or measures raised in this letter with you or your team – please contact the Charities Crisis Cabinet secretary David Crosbie on 0419624420.

Yours sincerely

(Signed)

Rev Tim Costello AO
Co- Chair, Charities Crisis Cabinet
28th February 2022

(Signed)

Adj Prof Susan Pascoe AM
Co- Chair, Charities Crisis Cabinet
28th February 2022