



**The Hon Greg Hunt MP
Minister for Health**

18 MAR 2019

The Hon Jenny Mikakos MP
Minister for Health and Ambulance Services
GPO Box 4057
Melbourne VIC 3001

Dear Minister

I am writing to you regarding the Victorian government policy to privatise public hospitals by applying pressure on patients to consent to be treated as a private, rather than public, patient within your public hospital system.

Whilst I have consistently raised this issue with you at the Council of Australian Governments' Health Council meetings and in negotiations on the new National Health Reform Agreement, the number of patients being treated as privately in public hospitals has continued to grow at an astounding rate.

I am deeply concerned with continued media reports that, in order to achieve this Victorian government policy, vulnerable patients who are, by definition, ill and may also be elderly or intimidated by their upcoming medical treatment, are being targeted aggressively and pressured to be treated as a private patient. Any pressure upon a patient to be anything other than a public patient is unethical and inappropriate.

In addition to the financial impact on patients, this Victorian government policy decision is having a significant impact on patient waiting times and poses a significant risk to patient health with public patients waiting twice as long as private patients to access vital services in public hospitals.

Further, this policy is also impacting on the viability of private and not for profit hospitals in Victoria, particularly in regional and remote locations. This represents a fundamental risk to patient choice and the hybrid Australian model. Private health insurance is an important part of Australia's health system and it is vital to ensure it remains sustainable now and into the future.

I have serious concerns that your policy to privatise public hospital is undermining the Medicare principles, taking advantage of patients and putting inappropriate pressure on private health insurance premiums and the private and not for profit hospital sector.

I seek an urgent response and guarantee from you that you will: abandon your policy to privatise public hospitals; set aside the targets you have set to maximise revenue from private patients; and that you will put in place and enforce a policy that prevents the aggressive, coercive and unethical practice of pressuring patients to be treated privately in your public hospitals.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Greg Hunt', written in a cursive style.

Greg Hunt