

The Hon. Martin Foley MP
Minister for Health
Level 22, 50 Lonsdale Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

By email: minister.health@dhhs.vic.gov.au

20 September, 2021

Dear Minister

RE: EASING OF LOCKDOWN RESTRICTIONS IN REGIONAL VICTORIA

I write on behalf of Occupational Therapy Australia (OTA) to express the profession's strong objection to the fact that while people in regional Victoria can now get a haircut and facial, they are unable to access allied health care unless that care is deemed to be 'essential'.

Occupational therapists in private practice, along with other allied health professionals, remain restricted and able to provide face-to-face treatment for 'essential care' only. This represents just a minor amendment to the previous threshold of 'critical care' and will result in only a slight increase in the availability of face-to-face care for clients.

Occupational therapists are highly trained health professionals with a demonstrated capacity to mitigate the risk involved in seeing people face-to-face during a time of pandemic. Moreover, the supports they provide to clients, while not deemed 'essential' by the State Government, enable these clients to function more effectively in often very difficult circumstances. In some cases, the work of occupational therapists enables clients to manage chronic pain, to maintain independence, and to perform the acts of daily living that you and I might take for granted.

Most importantly, this supposedly non-essential work prevents the further deterioration in clients' condition. This is great for them personally, while relieving pressure on our already over-stretched public health system. Many clients who have not met the criteria to be seen for many weeks are now experiencing an unnecessary deterioration in their health and wellbeing.

Victorian OTA members are bewildered and dismayed that the Andrews Government deems allied health to represent a higher risk and lesser value than beauty and grooming services that can now operate largely unrestricted.

Occupational therapists are AHPRA-registered, trained in infection control, and prioritise the health and safety of clients at all times. During the 18 months of this pandemic, the delivery of occupational therapy in private practice nationwide has proven to be overwhelmingly safe and valuable.

I implore the State Government to take the long-term health consequences of its policy into serious consideration and to allow immediate and full access to face-to-face occupational therapy in regional Victoria.

I also ask that access to allied health care be deemed a priority as the State Government plots its road map out of lockdown for the entire state.

Until such time as this is done, OTA will be urging its Victorian members to raise this issue as a matter of urgency with their State Members of Parliament.

Yours sincerely



Samantha Hunter
Chief Executive Officer