



THE HON BEN MORTON MP  
ASSISTANT MINISTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET

Reference: MC20-051635

Mr Gurnam Singh  
Founder  
Australian-Indian Sports Educational and Cultural Society  
Level 6, 60 York Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Singh

Thank you your letter dated 28 March 2020 to the Prime Minister, the Hon Scott Morrison MP regarding support for international students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Prime Minister has asked me to reply on his behalf.

I understand this is a difficult time for many people living in Australia, including our international students.

The Government is committed to ensuring that we protect people's health and wellbeing through this crisis. All Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) insurance products provide coverage for in-hospital treatment where it may relate to COVID-19. In addition, all OSHC insurance products provide coverage for outpatient services including doctor and general practitioner consultations, as well as psychiatric-related consultations.

To ensure continued access to essential primary health services during the pandemic, the Government has recently expanded Medicare-subsidised telehealth services. Where an existing face-to-face consultation was covered, OSHC members will now also have extended coverage for the corresponding telehealth service. Students can access telehealth services, including mental health treatment, in their own home using their telephone, or video conferencing such as FaceTime to connect with GP services.

Students should know if they are feeling particularly worried, they can access free, private and confidential counselling by calling Beyond Blue's dedicated COVID-19 helpline on 1800 512 348, or Lifeline on 13 11 14. There are also a range of other trusted Australian phone and web-based counselling services that can be found at [headtohealth.gov.au](http://headtohealth.gov.au).

Students are encouraged to rely on family support, part-time work where available and their own savings to sustain themselves in Australia. As part of their visa application, international students had to demonstrate that they can support themselves in their first year in Australia. International students are also able to work up to 40 hours per fortnight. International students working in supermarkets, in aged care and as nurses have had these hours temporarily extended to support these critical sectors.

Students who have been here longer than 12 months who find themselves in financial hardship will be able to access their Australian superannuation if needed to help them support themselves during this crisis.


The Government is also providing additional support for charities and other community organisations which provide emergency and food relief. This includes providing \$7 million to the Australian Red Cross over the next six months to deliver emergency relief and some casework support to people facing significant vulnerabilities who are on temporary visas. It will help with basic needs, such as food, medicine and immediate housing needs. Temporary visa holders who are experiencing financial crisis can contact the Australian Red Cross at [msp@redcross.org.au](mailto:msp@redcross.org.au) or visit [redcross.org.au/emergencyrelief](https://redcross.org.au/emergencyrelief) for more information.

The Government continues to consult with the international education sector through such bodies as the Global Reputation Taskforce of the Council for International Education, which comprises senior representatives from sector bodies and all states and territories. The Taskforce has committed to a number of actions to support students, particularly in readily sharing clear information with affected students and agents. The international education sector already provides some financial support for international students facing hardship.

Temporary visa holders who are unable to support themselves under these arrangements over the next six months are strongly encouraged to return home, where they may have access to additional supports.

Thank you for writing to the Prime Minister.

Yours sincerely



**BEN MORTON**

1 / 5 / 2020