



PRESIDENT: Dr Deidre Palmer

GENERAL SECRETARY: Colleen Geyer

March 26, 2020

The Hon Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

Supporting people temporarily living in Australia at the time of the Coronavirus crisis

The Uniting Church in Australia is writing to seek assurances from the federal government that all people currently living in Australia, who have no means to return to home countries and no income support as a result of the current context, be provided with adequate income and healthcare support during this crisis.

Commonwealth and State Governments in Australia have provided positive support to people and businesses who will be impacted by the Coronavirus crisis. The Uniting Church welcomes these measures, including the extra \$550 a fortnight payment to people on the following social security payments: JobSeeker Payment, Youth Allowance jobseeker, Parenting Payment, Farm Household Allowance and Special Benefit. These extra funds will assist the hundreds of thousands of people who have lost their jobs as a result of the measures needed to reduce the spread of the Coronavirus and are most welcome.

The Uniting Church understands that at present, more than 1.5 million people who are living in Australia on temporary visas or bridging visas are not eligible for the support payment. Some of those on temporary or bridging visas work in industries that have been heavily affected by the coronavirus crisis. Many cannot access standard social security support, such as working age payments and disability support payments. They also are not eligible to access other government services. These include many people who have applied for asylum in Australia.

Many of these people are no longer able to return to their home countries with flights being cancelled and borders being closed. Many who are seeking asylum in Australia are unable to return to home countries because of the security risks they face. For some, their current visas will soon run out and need to be extended. We ask that such people be treated fairly, especially given the current global context.

Further, at this time, there is a need to ensure that people living on temporary or bridging visas in Australia have access to Medicare. Access to Medicare will encourage them to seek medical assistance at the first sign they may have Coronavirus. If such people are unable to access health care immediately or face high costs for access, they are less likely to do so, further placing themselves and the broader community at risk.

In applying these initiatives, we acknowledge that the Commonwealth Government may need to take steps to ensure that any payments and support are directed to those in most need.

However, the situation for people living in Australia on temporary or bridging visas during this health crisis is urgent, and a direct response to their plight by the Australian Government will be an important measure to complement the strong measures you have already taken.

You remain in our prayers, at this very difficult time for our country and for those who have the responsibility of leadership.

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Deidre Palmer".

Dr Deidre Palmer
President
Uniting Church in Australia, Assembly

cc

Hon Alan Tudge MP, Acting Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and
Multicultural Affairs
Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, Minister for Families and Social Services,
Hon Greg Hunt MP, Minister for Health
Hon Anthony Albanese, Leader of the Opposition