Strengthening Ethics and Integrity in the Healthcare Sector in response to COVID-19

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In response to COVID-19, there has been unprecedented cooperation and collaboration among stakeholders at all levels of the Australian health sector.

Public and private hospitals have cooperated to make beds available for the care of patients affected by COVID-19; government and industry have worked together to increase the supply of critical medical equipment and medicines needed to diagnose and treat COVID-19 patients including: ventilators, testing kits and protective equipment for healthcare workers; consumer and industry groups have supported each other in identifying and addressing community and healthcare needs; and Federal and State governments have cooperated to reduce the national impact of the pandemic.

All of this illustrates how ethical collaboration and interaction among healthcare sector organisations – and those who work within them – can benefit patients, consumers, communities, populations, healthcare systems and the healthcare sector.

The experience of COVID-19 demonstrates the importance of the substantive and procedural principles developed by the Australian Ethical Health Alliance in its *Australian Consensus Framework for Ethical Collaboration in the Healthcare Sector (ACF).*

This framework now has over 70 signatories spanning the entire health sector, including industry, government, professional and consumer organisations.

The framework provides not only the basis for how the healthcare sector should function during times of crisis, but also a roadmap for how stakeholders can cooperate in future.

Several ACF signatories have been involved in collaborative COVID-19 efforts; for example, professional organisations and consumer advocacy groups came together with device manufacturers to seek authorisation from the competition watchdog for manufacturers to work together on supply issues.

This type of collaboration was recently reinforced by the Basel Institute on Governance, which highlighted the importance of collective action initiatives for ethics and integrity in healthcare amidst the pandemic and singled out the AEHA as "an exceptional model for unified commitment and coordination across the nation to align and strengthen ethical conduct."

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a terrible impact on the Australian and global community, but it has reminded us of the importance of ethics, social solidarity and engagement in building public trust and promoting collective action for the benefit of all.

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About the Australian Ethical Health Alliance

AEHA represents over 70 member organisations including industry, government, healthcare professionals, hospitals and patient groups, who share a commitment to ethical practice and collaboration.

An Australian delegation launched the ACF initiative at the APEC Business Ethics for SME Forum, in Tokyo, on 20 July 2018. AEHA was formed in April 2019 as the leading body to guide the implementation of the ACF. Membership consists of those member organisations who are signatories to the ACF.

The initiative is sector-lead and participation is voluntary. The support from federal and state and territory jurisdictions is also significant.

More information is available at: www.ethicalhealth.org.au