



**SENATOR THE HON RICHARD COLBECK**

Minister for Senior Australians and Aged Care Services

Minister for Sport

9 January 2022

Senator Katy Gallagher  
Chair  
The Senate Select Committee on COVID-19  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Gallagher

Thank you for your correspondence of 7 January 2022, inviting the Department of Health (the Department) and I to appear before the Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 (the Committee) on 14 January 2022.

Whilst the Department and I both recognise the importance of accountability to the Senate, including scrutiny of the Australian Government's COVID-19 response, I am concerned about the impact of the timing of this hearing. The COVID-19 pandemic is at a critical point with the onset of numerous Omicron outbreaks.

Diverting time and resources, including that of senior leaders within the Department who are playing a key role in the management of the current Omicron outbreaks, to give evidence before the Committee at this crucial time would impact the urgent and critical work the Department is undertaking with other Government agencies, states and territories to manage these outbreaks.

As an interim, the Department would like to offer a one hour briefing to the Committee via videoconference, and I welcome you to provide the Department with an alternate later date to schedule a Committee hearing.

Yours sincerely

Richard Colbeck

cc: The Hon Greg Hunt MP