

JOINT REQUEST FROM EATING DISORDERS ALLIANCE OF AUSTRALIA (EDAA)

19 March 2020

Attention: Mr Steven Cain, Managing Director and CEO, Coles Group

Dear Mr Cain,

The Eating Disorders Alliance of Australia (EDAA) is a collaboration of organisations in the eating disorder sector, representing both consumer/carer and health professional. We applaud Coles' decision to provide increased access to supermarkets for some of the most vulnerable in our community. We respectfully ask that consideration also be given to including those with an eating disorder.

As a result of the complex interaction between psychiatric and medical implications, Eating Disorders have the highest mortality rate of any psychiatric illness. People with an Eating Disorder have extremely high energy needs, typically much higher than the general population. Not meeting these high energy needs can result in serious health consequences, and even death. For those with eating disorders, food is medicine and cannot be denied or limited.

We are concerned that current stress around access to supermarkets and adequate grocery items has the potential to cause concern for those with eating disorders, and have a detrimental impact on both their physical and mental health. The two main challenges we foresee are:

- Insufficient access to the quantity and variety of food required for adequate nutrition, which has the potential to result in medical instability/ hospitalisation due to malnutrition.
- Panic buying, chaotic and crowded supermarkets. Up to 60-80% of people with an eating disorder have co-occurring anxiety disorders. Many in this community stand to find accessing food so stressful that they may avoid shopping, increasing the risk of not eating, and impacting their recovery. In addition, they may endure supermarkets with extreme distress, which could have a detrimental impact on their overall mental health.

We believe it is imperative that people with an eating disorder and their families/carers are included among those able to access early opening hours. The opportunity to shop at a time which is less busy and stressful, and to have increased access the types/amount of food required, stands to significantly reduce distress within this cohort, supporting recovery and reducing burden on medical practitioners and facilities. This in turn supports prioritising of these resources to those needing treatment for COVID-19.

We would be happy to be guided by your recommendations, and commit to within our community to determine the best form way to operationalise this request. We propose the EDAA design a form that patients can have stamped/ co-signed by a member of their clinical team (GP, psychologist, dietitian, or other mental health clinician). As a group, we will commit to distributing this information to our communities, so the one million Australians currently living with an eating disorder remain as supported as possible during these unprecedented times.

We look forward to your positive response.

Kind regards,

Eating Disorders Alliance of Australia

Signed by:

Mr Kevin Barrow, CEO, Butterfly Foundation

Dr Kim Hurst, President, Australia and New Zealand Academy of Eating Disorders (ANZAED)

Mr David Garvey, Chair, Eating Disorders Family Association (EDFA)

Ms Belinda Caldwell, CEO, Eating Disorders Victoria (EDV)

Ms Belinda Chelius, CEO, Eating Disorders Queensland (EDQ)

Ms Jemma Caswell, Bridges Eating Disorders Association of Western Australia