

## **Call from Chair of PHA's Asian Caucus to work together to combat COVID-19**

*Dr Lifeng Zhou, Chair of the PHA's Asian Caucus calls for everyone to work together, all countries/territories, ethnic groups, faiths and cultures, in the containment of the Pandemic COVID-19:*

[Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus](#), the Director-General of World Health Organization (WHO) declared (11 March 2020) that the outbreak of COVID-19 in the world is a 'pandemic'. A pandemic is defined as the uncontrolled worldwide spread of a new disease.

COVID-19, caused by the novel coronavirus, officially named as SARS-Cov2, is a new illness that can affect lungs, airways and other organs. According to WHO as of [18 March 2020](#), there were 191,127 confirmed cases reported globally with 7807 deaths. China and the Republic of Korea had significantly declining epidemics, but the spread of SARS-Cov2 in other parts of the world is significant.

WHO calls for all countries and territories to take urgent and vigilant action to work together, to do the right things with calm, to protect all citizens of the world.

However, since the emergence of COVID-19 we have seen instances of public stigmatisation, the rise of racism and use of stereotypes against some population groups. This is harmful and unethical, as stigma can, according to WHO, 1) drive people to hide the illness to avoid discrimination, 2) prevent people from seeking health care immediately and 3) discourage them from adopting healthy behaviours.

While we're very happy to see the [Ministry of Health](#) show its understanding of and respect for the Chinese culture when 157 people from Wuhan were held in quarantine for two weeks, we are also dismayed to hear how Chinese people have experienced stigma and discrimination associated with public fear of the novel coronavirus in New Zealand.

The recent Public Health Expert blog of "[Getting Through Together: Ethical Values for a Pandemic](#)" written by Ruth Cunningham, Charlotte Paul and Andrew Moore, provides balanced ethical considerations when responding to a pandemic like COVID-19. We all need to draw on our common humanity and be explicit about our values. As they put it: "Recognising this will help us make good decisions in difficult situations so that, for example, the need to impose restrictive measures and to protect ourselves does not conflict with fairness, respect, and neighbourliness."

The [PHA](#) together with its [Asian Caucus](#) call each of us to be intentional and thoughtful when communicating on social media and other platforms, showing supportive behaviours as we fight against our common health threat: the novel coronavirus.

*[Be Safe by following public health advice;](#)  
[Be Smart by being informed from accurate sources;](#)  
[Be Kind and support one another to fight COVID-19](#)*