**Media Release**

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**Impending flu season to put considerable pressure on Tasmania's already stretched public hospitals**

This year’s influenza season is set to begin in earnest in just four weeks and AMA Tasmania President A/Prof Tim Greenaway says Tasmania’s public hospitals may not be able to cope with the extra load.

“The flu season in Melbourne began at the end of last month and we know from previous experience that there is a gap of about six weeks between the start of the annual outbreak in Melbourne and its arrival in Tasmania,” said A/Prof Greenaway.

“This gives us less than four weeks from now before the flood of cases starts to hit out GPs and our public hospitals.”

Royal Hobart Hospital has joined a consortium of major hospitals across Australia to monitor flu outbreaks and A/Prof Greenaway said doctors have serious doubts about whether our hospital system can cope with the influx of admissions.

“Last winter, across all the hospitals in the consortium, 12.5 per cent of all admitted patients were admitted because of the flu and complications of the flu and even that figure is widely thought to be an under-estimate,” he said.

“Some of those people were very sick indeed, with 7.5 per cent of all flu inpatients needing an intensive care unit.

“Tasmania simply does not have adequate capacity in its major public hospitals which are already operating over capacity when there is a mildly busy period.

“Over Easter, the Royal Hobart Hospital was operating in excess of 100 per cent capacity and elective surgeries were cancelled to free up beds.

“We can expect this to happen again, with further disruption and disappointment for people who have been waiting, in many cases, for far too long to have their operations and this is a very expensive and wasteful way of meeting any influx of patients.

“When elective surgery is cancelled to free up beds for medical patients, the surgeons, theatre nurses and operating theatres sit idle, costing money but producing nothing.

“This is no way to run a hospital system. Both state and federal governments need to take this situation far more seriously than they are right now.

“The state government has the money in health-specific GST to invest in our hospitals and to fix this problem. The fact they refuse to spend health money on the health system is simply unacceptable.”

**ENDS**

**For more information: Ned Worledge, Font PR, 0400 446 736**