

Australian Medical Association Limited

ABN 37 008 426 793

42 Macquarie Street, Barton ACT 2600: PO Box 6090, Kingston ACT 2604
 Telephone: (02) 6270 5400 Facsimile (02) 6270 5499
 Website : <http://www.ama.com.au/>



CORONAVIRUS HEALTH PACKAGE WELCOME BUT MUCH MORE TO DO

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today that the AMA welcomes the Government’s Covid-19 health package - especially the roll-out of new Medicare telehealth items and respiratory clinics.

Dr Bartone said this is a really good start but there is much more to do to reduce the movement and spread of the virus.

Dr Bartone said the AMA has been calling for the telehealth items since the bushfire crisis to help doctors and patients in emergency situations.

“The new telehealth items will help doctors to safely assess patients who may have contracted coronavirus,” Dr Bartone said.

“GPs will be able to assess people who are concerned that they may have come into contact with Covid-19 and help contain the virus, particularly as most people will simply need to self-isolate while recovering from it.

“This initiative will support and protect patients who are more vulnerable to the impact of the virus by keeping them away from areas where they might be exposed to the virus, and help to minimise the risks of transmission.

“With growing concerns about the adequacy of the supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), it would also reduce demand on valuable PPE.

“The AMA is also seeking more information about the extent to which these new telehealth items will be available to all members of the medical profession at the forefront of guarding against coronavirus.

“Broad access to telehealth means that we can engage doctors who may not be able to be involved in assessing Covid-19 patients because of practice infrastructure issues and underlying health restrictions, including doctors who themselves may have to self-isolate for 14 days.

“By treating the vast majority of ‘well’ patients with Covid-19 at home, we are significantly reducing the spread of the disease in the community.

“Most patients will present with little or no symptoms. These measures are all about having our health system prepared and properly resourced to stop the spread of the virus.”

Dr Bartone said the AMA will work with Primary Health Networks (PHNs) and other groups to identify the most appropriate properly resourced sites for the 100 new ‘pop-up respiratory’ fever clinics announced by the Government.

“These will need to be located in larger general practices that have the space and infrastructure to cordon off a separate clinic area to allow normal everyday GP work to be conducted without interruption.

“The fever clinics should be spread out across population areas, have multiple exits, and be near public hospitals to allow easy transport of patients with severe Covid-19 symptoms.

“We need to get these clinics identified and up and running as soon as possible,” Dr Bartone said.

Dr Bartone said it is vital that the Government’s \$30 million national communications campaign gets clear and comprehensive public health messages and information to the general public and frontline health workers as a matter of urgency.

“There is a lot of information flowing from the Federal and State and Territory Governments, and from Chief Medical Officers and Chief Health Officers and Health Departments, but the AMA is hearing that the messaging has been inconsistent, and sometimes conflicting.

“Local GPs in suburbs and towns are telling us that the flow of quality information is sometimes poor, and the supply of protective equipment is inadequate in places.

“We need to see clear and instructional education and information material, in many languages, at every airport, railway station, bus stop and station, doctor’s surgery, shopping centre, office blocks, schools, post offices, everywhere where people gather.

“Posters, signs, and ads must be splashed across print, radio, television, cinemas, digital channels, and social media very soon.

“Covid-19 is a national emergency, and we must all respond accordingly. Education about how to avoid contracting this deadly virus is crucial to stop its spread,” Dr Bartone said.

Dr Bartone said that the AMA is very concerned about the serious impact Covid-19 will have on the aged care sector. The AMA is confident there will be further Government announcements to cover this sector in coming days.

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CONTACT: John Flannery 02 6270 5477 / 0419 494 761
 Maria Hawthorne 02 6270 5478 / 0427 209 753

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