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**AMA URGES COAG HEALTH COUNCIL TO ADOPT NATIONALLY  
 CONSISTENT MANDATORY REPORTING LAWS**

AMA President, Dr Michael Gannon, will tomorrow personally make an impassioned plea to the nation’s Health Ministers to do the right and responsible thing for the mental health of Australia’s doctors and medical students by adopting nationally consistent mandatory reporting laws.

Dr Gannon has been given a rare and privileged invitation to personally address the COAG Health Council meeting in Sydney about the urgency and importance of providing doctors with a safe and confidential environment in which to seek help for their own mental health and stress-related conditions.

It is expected that the Council will make a decision on the way ahead for mandatory reporting at tomorrow’s meeting.

Dr Gannon said that the AMA has been for some time been calling on COAG to adopt national laws, built on the best aspects of the Western Australian model of mandatory reporting provisions, to allow doctors to access the care and support they need.

“Doctors deserve the right to access health services, just like their patients,” Dr Gannon said.

“There is a strong body of evidence, including extensive work by Beyondblue, showing that doctors and other health workers are at greater risk of mental illness and stress-related problems, yet the current laws inhibit many from seeking treatment for a mental health condition because they fear the impact it could have on their medical registration and their ability to practise medicine.

“The current mandatory reporting laws have a two-fold effect – some people will not seek help at all, and those who do may not divulge all the necessary information to receive appropriate care.

“The AMA is extremely concerned that we have a situation now where doctors may be avoiding appropriate health care, potentially putting both themselves and their patients at risk.

“We know this. Doctors have told us. We have lost too many colleagues and friends to the scourge of mental illness. The figures compel us to act.

“The AMA’s view is clear. We need a model that addresses the issues currently stopping doctors from seeking the treatment they need. We need a model that we know for certain will work, while still protecting patients. We need a model that can be adopted nationally.

“The COAG Health Council is committed to developing a nationally consistent approach to mandatory reporting. They must choose the right model. It must be based on the best aspects of the Western Australian model, which exempts doctors from the effects of mandatory reporting requirements when seeking treatment for health-related concerns.

“The WA model is the right one to draw on when it comes to giving doctors access to health care. It is a proven model. It has given doctors the confidence to seek the help they need, and there is no evidence that it has diminished patient safety in any way.

“It is also a model that was recommended in the Independent Review of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme, a Senate report, and a number of academic studies.

“It in no way stops the medical profession’s ethical and professional responsibilities to report a practitioner who may be placing the public at risk.

“Options that simply re-word the current legislation, or seek to maintain the status quo, will do nothing but condemn doctors to continue to suffer in silence.

“The COAG Health Council tomorrow has an unprecedented opportunity to address the problem once and for all – because healthy doctors are best placed to help patients. Anything less puts both doctors and patients at risk.”

## **Background**

- Meta-analysis of a Beyondblue literature review showed that male doctors had a 26 per cent higher risk of suicide, while female doctors had a 146 per cent higher risk of suicide compared to the general population.
- An extensive study of more than 12,000 doctors by Beyondblue in 2013 revealed that 34.3 per cent cited concerns about their medical registration as a barrier to seeking treatment for a mental health condition.
- The same study showed that doctors report much higher rates of psychological distress and much higher rates of suicidal thinking than the general population or other population groups.
- The same study revealed that approximately 2 per cent of doctors reported that they had attempted suicide.
- The Western Australian Parliament accepted the medical profession’s arguments, and the Western Australian National Law contains an explicit exemption from mandatory reporting for treating doctors.
- Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) annual report figures show that mandatory notifications have risen in Western Australia since the exemption came into effect – from 12 in 2011-12 to 35 in 2016-17.

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