

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/>



**BARRIERS TO CARE FOR PATIENTS IN AGED CARE FACILITIES
 MUST BE REMOVED**

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety is an opportunity to focus on the need to remove the barriers doctors and other health practitioners face in delivering care to patients in residential facilities, AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today.

Dr Bartone, who appeared as a witness to the Royal Commission late yesterday, said that doctors who visited nursing homes usually had a long-standing association with their patients, and wanted to continue that patient’s clinical care.

“If you are continually meeting barriers to facilitating that care, that creates anything from frustration to concern to worry,” Dr Bartone said.

“And ultimately, for some GPs, that worry leads them to decide that ‘no, I’m not going to continue – either I won’t take on any new patients, or I’m not going to continue to visit the facilities’.

“Both the AMA survey of doctors who visit residential aged care facilities and anecdotal feedback show that doctors are increasingly looking at cutting back on their visits, or stopping altogether.”

Barriers to care include a lack of registered nursing staff, which, if not present for a clinical handover by the doctor, creates the risk of crucial medical information being missed, and increases the risk of patients not receiving their prescribed medication when required. as well as an increasing reliance on lesser-trained personal care assistants.

Dr Bartone said the Medicare rebate for visiting patients in residential aged care facilities did not take into account the added expenses compared to a patient consultation in the doctor’s surgery, including travel time, difficulties in locating patients if they are not in their designated rooms at the time of the visit, increased paperwork, and follow-up telephone calls with the facility and the patient’s family.

Dr Bartone’s testimony can be read in full at <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/hearings/Documents/transcripts-2019/transcript-20-february-2019.pdf>

The AMA Aged Care Survey is available at <https://ama.com.au/article/2017-ama-aged-care-survey>

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CONTACT: Maria Hawthorne 02 6270 5478 / 0427 209 753

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