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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, ABC TV, *News Breakfast with Michael Rowland and Lisa Millar*, Thursday, 25 June 2020

Subject: COVID-19, Victorian outbreak, AMA call for Centre for Disease Control

MICHAEL ROWLAND: Let's go back to the coronavirus situation now. One thousand Defence personnel are heading to Victoria.

LISA MILLAR: It comes as the AMA calls for more to be done to manage future pandemics with the creation of a Centres for Disease Control, similar to what they have in the US. Well for more AMA President, Tony Bartone, joins us now. Good morning, Tony, welcome to Breakfast.

TONY BARTONE: Good morning, Lisa. Thank you.

LISA MILLAR: Can we just touch on this announcement that's come out in the last hour about 1,000 military personnel heading to Victoria? What do you make of that decision?

TONY BARTONE: Well, at the heart of it is basically a support in terms of logistic and other processes around managing the response to this up-tick in cases that we have seen in Victoria. It is about ensuring that, both for the security personnel or the contractors at the quarantine facilities, it is about ensuring we've got additional logistics support at that front line where the testing has obviously been under the pump under the last few days. And also to assist with even just the communication and indeed spreading the message around the streets and the suburbs in those affected areas. The full details are yet to be fully released, but they're the areas that I would expect where they'll lend support, essentially bolstering the logistical response and the expertise at the front-line.

LISA MILLAR: It really says something about where we are at, doesn't it, though, that that's a step that needs to be taken? That reproduction number of virus here in Melbourne keeps ticking up. How concerned should we be? Is this the second wave that we have been warned about?

TONY BARTONE: Yes, it does send a very strong message that this is serious. We have always said, right from the beginning, that as we begin to relax those measures in terms of the restrictions that we have had over the last few months - the restrictions that have protected the community so well and that the community has really significantly taken to - as we relax those measures, we expected to see sporadic, localised outbreaks.

Now, clearly some of the messaging has been lost. It has been a long number of months in terms of dealing with it, and complacency, you might say, has possibly started to set in. And it is a reminder that the virus is still there, it needs to be treated with due caution, due respect. And this is not over for, indeed, many, many months to come until we effectively and definitely get a vaccine to assist us with prevention.

The R number, the 2.5, is at one of the highest levels that we have for a number of months now. We need to really drive that down, we need to get on top of this before, indeed, it becomes anything more and leads us into a second wave.

LISA MILLAR: At the moment, it's a sporadic outburst of the virus? It's not a second wave?

TONY BARTONE: Look, we can get caught up in semantics. But if we do nothing, if we bury our head in the sand, if we don't jump on this immediately and with everything we have got, it'll most definitely become a second wave.

LISA MILLAR: What are you going to tell the inquiry today in Canberra?

TONY BARTONE: What we're going to say is that in terms of the response, Australia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it's still early to call the full report on it, you might say. We're still, you know, dealing with that immediate after-effect of the first wave. But clearly, both the Federal Government and the National Cabinet, AHPPC, they've all come together and they've really guided Australia through that first wave.

What we have seen there is the importance of having medical leadership entrenched in the decision-making activity, and that has been the core of it. But it has happened all because of good will, you might say. The ad hoc way that AHPCC is set-up, there is no real long-term resourcing, indeed, supported regulations around it. It needs that sort of permanency to guide it through the non-pandemic periods.

We've seen with Zika virus, with SARS, and now with COVID. these biosecurity risks will always continue to be very, very prevalent and present. There'll be more in the future. We can't rely on good will and the people in those positions. We need to have permanency of both funding, of process, of research, of coordination and planning that occurs in between the pandemics to ensure that we have got the right response in the pandemic.

LISA MILLAR: Tony Bartone, thanks for your time this morning.

TONY BARTONE: My pleasure.

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