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BUDGET FORECASTS MUST BE REALISTIC ABOUT A VACCINE
AMA Federal Council Communique

Next week’s Federal Budget must be based on the reality that the world is at least a year away from a broad roll out of a COVID-19 vaccine, and not on optimistic forecasts that the global economy is about to return to business as usual, the nation’s leading medical association has warned.

The AMA has released a communique from its most recent Federal Council meeting, held on 26 September, which was dominated by the global pandemic.

“We have seen different strategies adopted by different States and Territories, with differing results,” AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, said.

“What we need to see now is national leadership, that ensures that all Australians understand the challenges that we are facing as a nation, and one single strategy that will lead us all out of this pandemic.

“This is how we get back to normal.”

Dr Khorshid said that, while there is optimism that one of the 150-plus vaccines and treatments in trial around the world might succeed, it will be some time before any of them are widely available.

“Governments and the community must also contemplate the potential scenario where a vaccine is not found, and the available treatments continue to offer supportive care as opposed to a cure,” Dr Khorshid said.

“We know from the Spanish Flu that this might mean living with the virus for two to three years before the pandemic comes to an end, although we still have much to learn about COVID-19 and its long term impact.”

Dr Khorshid said that the Federal Government had acted quickly to protect the economy through the JobKeeper and increased JobSeeker payments, and there is the very likely possibility that these will need to be maintained for longer than currently planned to protect workers and businesses while the threat of the virus exists.

“The JobSeeker Coronavirus supplement has helped people to survive very difficult economic times, and the Commonwealth must now consider a permanent increase to the rate of JobSeeker,” Dr Khorshid said.

“This support must remain in place for a number of years, recognising not only the impact of COVID-19, but also unemployment and social dislocation that will be a feature of our economic recovery.”

The AMA Federal Council Communique is available here <https://ama.com.au/article/ama-federal-council-covid-19-communique>