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AMA WARNS THAT SECOND-BEST MANDATORY REPORTING LAWS WILL NOT BE GOOD ENOUGH

The AMA is warning today that the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Amendment (Tranche 1A) Bill*, agreed by Health Ministers at the COAG Health Council on 12 October, and which is being introduced in the Queensland Parliament this week, must not be a second-best solution that may not protect the health of doctors.

The AMA and other stakeholders have not been provided with the contents of the Bill, but it is feared that amendments sought by the AMA and many others were ignored by the COAG Health Council.

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said that the Health Ministers may believe they have made sufficient changes to the existing laws, but the AMA is adamant that its proposed amendments were vital to make the new national laws safe enough to give doctors confidence to seek help for their own health needs.

The AMA amendments were a minimum requirement since the Ministers refused to adopt the current successful and workable Western Australia laws, which will remain in place regardless of the COAG action.

Dr Bartone said that he cannot understand why the COAG Health Council did not adopt the AMA recommendations and evidence in framing the new laws.

“Our fear is that the Bill going before the Queensland Parliament will stop doctors seeking health care when they need it,” Dr Bartone said.

“We fear that this Bill will not stop doctor suicides.”

The AMA has consistently and loudly called for changes to the mandatory reporting laws – including directly to successive COAG Health Council meetings and through lobbying of Ministers by State and Territory AMAs – that will protect the health of doctors, which in turn will benefit patients.

“Mandatory reporting affects every doctor, their families, their loved ones, their colleagues ...and their patients,” Dr Bartone said.

“Our doctors desperately need legislation that does not actively discourage them from seeking medical treatment when they need it. Doctors are patients too. They should have the same rights to access confidential high-quality medical treatment as their own patients and all other Australians do.

“We urgently need a nationally consistent approach to mandatory reporting provisions. It will provide confidence to doctors. It will enable and empower them to seek treatment for their own health conditions anywhere in Australia.

“The AMA has worked for many years, in good faith, at both the State/Territory and Federal level, to highlight how sensible and practical amendments could and should be made to address this issue.

“We have highlighted how the West Australian model currently operates successfully to provide access to health services for doctors, while at the same time protecting public safety.

“We have highlighted how the AMA’s preferred so-called ‘WA lite’ model could do the same across the country.

“We have also provided advice to Ministers on how alternative proposals could be modified to give them the best chance of success.

“It is time to stop the pain, suffering, and, in some tragic cases, the suicides of our hardworking doctors and seriously address the issue.

“But, sadly, the COAG Health Council may not have gone far enough to protect the health of Australia’s doctors.

“If the Bill, once released, does not provide the complete confidence and security that doctors need to be open about their health issues and seek help, the AMA will act in the best interests of the health and wellbeing of doctors right around Australia, and will heighten its public campaign to have our governments do the right and proper thing to protect the health of doctors,” Dr Bartone said.

Read this remarkable personal account of the need for doctors to seek help for their physical and mental health needs by President of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, and AMA Federal Councillor, Professor Steve Robson <https://www.doctorportal.com.au/mjainsight/2018/41/learn-from-me-speak-out-seek-help-get-treatment/>

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