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**PRESCRIPTION FOR VACCINE RESET**

*AMA outlines key actions to build vaccine confidence*

The AMA is calling on Thursday’s National Cabinet to adopt clear changes to ‘reset’ Australia’s vaccination program against COVID-19, today outlining four key actions that governments must take. This follows AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, addressing the National Cabinet on 19 April 2021 on the COVID-19 vaccine rollout.

“Our primary healthcare network has already demonstrated its capacity to vaccinate Australians aged 50 years and older against COVID-19 – as long as they can access the vaccines,” AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid said.

“It is reassuring that National Cabinet has already reiterated that general practice remains the primary model of rolling out vaccinations for Australians 50 years of age and older.

“GPs have a proven record of vaccination, and are ready, willing and able to vaccinate many more people.”

The AMA supports bringing forward the timetable for vaccinating those patients who are 50 years and over as part of efforts to encourage take-up in the community.

“We are seeing vacant appointment times and we need to ensure that these are filled each and every day,” Dr Khorshid said.

“But the clear first step is ensuring we have improved the supply of the vaccine in the hands of our GPs.

“We know the Government has faced supply constraints, but it is important that the reset sees more of the available supply of vaccine going to general practice so that GPs can deal with the increased demand that will come from those aged 50 and over.

“Secondly, success will depend on public confidence in COVID-19 vaccinations.

“Australians need greater certainty about vaccine risks and benefits so they can make their appointments with confidence.”

Doctors are used to, and very good at, communicating the benefits of vaccines to patients. But the AMA believes there is a need to ensure that patients know they can meet with their GP, if needed, to discuss the clear benefits of being vaccinated, particularly in light of the updated advice from the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI).

“We need to adjust the Medicare system as a matter of urgency, to ensure that those patients who need to spend that extra time with their GP discussing their COVID-19 vaccinations concerns are better supported,” Dr Khorshid said.

“We know that once patients have the chance to discuss their concerns with their GP, vaccination is more likely to occur.

Thirdly, the AMA is calling on all governments to better manage the national discussion on vaccine benefits.

“Clearly, getting vaccinated is the right thing for individuals – it protects you against death and serious symptoms from COVID-19.

“But we must also start a conversation on our responsibility to each other – and to the community in general – that comes from each of us being vaccinated.

“Every one of us has a critical role in protecting the vulnerable and those who don’t have access to vaccine yet, including our children.

“Vaccine confidence and an increased vaccination rate has many benefits for us all – it will mean a greater ability to travel to see family and friends, and increased economic and job activity – all things important to the overall health of Australians. It will also prevent devastating lockdowns.

“It’s time for all governments to develop a clear, consistent campaign to achieve this.”

Fourthly, there must be an increased role for the States and Territories rolling out the Pfizer vaccine, including for healthcare workers. Expanding the state-run vaccination hubs should result in a faster rollout, and these hubs should expand to vaccinate those under 50 years of age, as Pfizer supply becomes more available.

“Later in the year, GPs will also be able to play an important role out in the rollout of Pfizer vaccines, but this will need careful planning and design, given the greater storage and logistical problems associated with this vaccine,” said Dr Khorshid.

“Through hard work, sacrifices and the efforts of every Australian, we’ve managed to suppress COVID-19 in Australia very well.

“But we cannot be complacent, we cannot delay, and we cannot allow misinformation to creep into our vaccination efforts. It’s time to resolve the issues in our vaccination program – it’s our best hope of tackling COVID-19 once and for all.”

## **Background**

AMA’s four key actions:

1. The Government must improve the distribution of the vaccine to our GPs so they can deal with the increased demand that will come from those aged 50 and over.
  2. Australians need greater certainty about vaccine risks and benefits, so they can make appointments with their GP with confidence, supported by adjustments to the Medicare system.
  3. Governments must better manage the national discussion on vaccine benefits, including the benefits to the whole community, especially around protecting the vulnerable and those who don’t have access to vaccine yet.
  4. States and Territories must take a greater role in administering the Pfizer vaccine, including for healthcare workers, and consideration of the role GPs can play in supporting.
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