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AMA welcomes extra funding for GPs involved in vaccine rollout

The Australian Medical Association (AMA) welcomes today’s Federal Government announcement of extra funding for longer GP consultations to inform patients of benefits of vaccination against COVID-19 and assist them in making informed decisions.

AMA President Dr Omar Khorshid said the announcement by the Minister for Health, Greg Hunt, would allow GPs to spend more time with patients to ensure that they were aware of all the benefits of a COVID-19 vaccination, and boost confidence in the vaccine.

Dr Khorshid said he had been raising the need for doctors to spend more time with patients with the Prime Minister and the Minister for Health for several months, and was pleased with the Government’s announcement of a new level B equivalent Medicare item that could be used in addition to the standard COVID-19 assessment items for patients who require longer consultations.

“We commend the Minister for Health on this announcement because it is a big step in allowing doctors to take the time to sit down and discuss fully with their patients, some of whom are nervous, the benefits and incredibly low risks associated with vaccination.

“This announcement is particularly timely given the decision yesterday by the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) to change its guidance and lift the age for the Astra Zeneca vaccine to 60 years and over.

“This is an investment in the vaccination program roll-out, which is so important for Australia in getting on top of the pandemic and plugging gaps in the vaccination rollout.

“Some patients are understandably concerned following ATAGI’s decision and the Government’s announcement today will allow doctors to spend the extra time needed with a patient to have a more in-depth discussion about getting vaccinated, instead of putting a decision on hold or deciding not to get a second dose of Astra Zeneca.

“Despite the challenges presented by the changes in advice from ATAGI and the impact it has had on general practice, GPs will continue to put patients first and support them in making informed decisions about vaccination to protect them against COVID-19.”

Dr Khorshid said overseas evidence clearly showed that two doses of Astra Zeneca were needed to protect people against COVID-19 variants, including the Delta strain, and confirmed that the risks of blood clotting on second doses was very low.

The AMA would continue to work closely with the Federal Government to progressively roll out the Pfizer vaccine in general practice in July.

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