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MEDIA STATEMENT

AMA PRESIDENT DR OMAR KHORSHID

HEALTH ADVICE CRITICAL TO RECOVERY PLAN

The AMA is very concerned at the apparent shift in approach to the management of COVID-19 in NSW announced today by Premier Dominic Perrottet and the potential sidelining of public health advice.

The changes to the roadmap have occurred at the 11th hour without the presence of the Chief Health Officer Dr Kerry Chant at the announcement. Meanwhile, the NSW Government's Crisis Cabinet has morphed into an Economic Recovery Committee. This strongly suggests to the community that health advice will no longer guide the NSW Government as it navigates this critical phase of the pandemic.

The AMA supports gradual opening up of the economy and the loosening of restrictions, but it is critical to observe the impact of each step on transmission and case numbers, otherwise NSW may still see hospitals become completely overwhelmed despite high vaccination rates.

The ultimate outcomes of opening too fast or too early will be avoidable deaths and the reintroduction of lockdowns and other restrictions - things no-one in NSW wants to see. Economic recovery cannot occur without protecting the health of the community - this is a lesson we have already learnt during this pandemic, and it must not be forgotten in the reopening phase.

While NSW has hit an average of 70% of its population of 16 and over being fully vaccinated, this number rapidly drops below 70% for people under 40 years and to as low as 47% for those in the 16 to 19-year-old age bracket.

Doherty Institute modelling shows the potential for transmission in these younger age groups is significant and high rates of vaccination are needed to help contain the virus.

NSW must not be reckless at this critical time. That would cost more lives, cause more suffering, and put the economies of NSW and the nation at risk. Sydney must take this opportunity to show the rest of the country how to live with COVID whilst protecting health and health care.

If the NSW 'COVID and Economic Recovery Committee' moves to open the economy faster than is advised by health experts and the modelling, they will ultimately be held accountable for the impacts of those decisions, including potentially excess deaths, overwhelmed hospitals and the economic catastrophe that would accompany further lockdowns. The AMA is concerned that the decisions taken in NSW since the change of leadership signal a very different approach to that taken under the leadership of former Premier Gladys Berejiklian.

The AMA supports opening-up, but it must be done wisely and cautiously, with the ability to pause and assess the impact of lifting restrictions, before moving to the next stage. To do otherwise risks far too much.

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