



Transcript: AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, Perth press conference, Wednesday, 15 December 2021

Subject: Australia's booster program falling behind

OMAR KHORSHID: The AMA has written to the Government, significantly concerned with the pace of the booster program rollout and the level of support that is being provided to general practitioners and pharmacists in order to achieve the extraordinary numbers of vaccinations we need to get into Australians' arms as soon as possible in order to help deal with the rising numbers of COVID cases in New South Wales and, of course, Omicron entering Australia.

It's clear from overseas that Omicron is a significant threat. Even if the disease is more mild, it is spreading rapidly in countries around the world. And from what we know, the only protection we can offer at this stage is extra immunity through a booster dose.

Now, the amount of money that the Government have been paying general practitioners and pharmacists for booster doses is significantly less than for the first two doses, and this is very difficult to understand at a time when it is such a national priority for us to get every Australian boosted in order to protect them from Omicron and even from Delta.

The Government needs to demonstrate its commitment to the booster program by upping that fee to make sure that GPs and pharmacists are able to make the investments they need to to employ the staff, to set up extra clinics in the evenings, on weekends, and so on.

This is not just participating; this is enthusiastic participation that we need from everyone in primary care - from GPs, from pharmacists, and [audio skip] from our state-run vaccination centres. We've got still around 30 million doses of vaccines to deliver to Australians over the next few months as we start the five-to-11 age group vaccination program early next year and, of course, the rapidly emerging need to get every Australian boosted as soon as we can.

QUESTION: Omar, can you just explain why the rapid spread of Omicron is a problem if it is milder and the proportion of hospitalisations lower?

OMAR KHORSHID: Even if Omicron is a more mild disease, if it spreads rapidly through a community and infects five, 10 times as many people as Delta is, then the numbers of people getting sick are still going to be too high for our hospital system to cope with, and the reality is we'll end up back into lockdown, social distancing restrictions, and disarray.

We'll see borders coming back up, and that's the last thing I think that any Australian wants to see. It's the last thing governments want to see. And the only solution we have and the data that we have so far, albeit limited, suggest that boosters are a solution for Omicron, that with high levels of immunity, it does protect people better against Omicron infection and symptoms. And that's something that the AMA is very supportive of. Whilst we do not have every little bit of scientific data we need, it's very strongly pointing towards the ongoing reality that vaccinations are our best defence against COVID.

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