

Australian Medical Association Limited

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AUSTRALIA MUST MOVE QUICKLY TO SPEED UP COVID-19 BOOSTER PROGRAM

The AMA has warned Australia's COVID-19 booster program is already falling behind, risking more suffering from COVID-19 and a repeat of mistakes seen overseas where we are seeing the rapid spread of Omicron.

AMA President Dr Omar Khorshid said today the AMA was extremely concerned at the lack of support for the booster program, particularly through General Practice and pharmacies.

"GPs and pharmacists are not being properly supported to implement this critical booster program," he said.

Dr Khorshid said the focus was on GPs and primary care to do the heavy lifting in the roll out of the booster program as the states and territories wound back vaccination hubs and returned to the normal delivery of health services.

"Whilst we recognise that the state and territory vaccination hubs have taken nurses out of hospitals, aged care, and other health settings, it is critical that state and territory governments continue to run these clinics to ensure adequate access to vaccines for Australians needing their booster shot.

"By the end of this month close to four million people will be eligible for the booster, however, in the last week Australia has only been able to administer just over 210,000 booster doses.

"The latest strain of COVID-19, Omicron, poses a significant potential risk to the population and appears much more transmissible than previous strains, so we have to pick up the pace to protect the community.

"We need to urgently reach out to the public to encourage them to come forward for their booster, and GPs are best placed to do this for many in the population."

Dr Khorshid said there would be an increased surge in demand for vaccinations early in the New Year when 5-to-11-year-old children become eligible for their first shot, and this could hold up the booster program unless governments mobilised now.

"COVID-19 has consistently been able to adapt and evade our best defences throughout the pandemic. Omicron is just another example of how the virus adapts, making three vaccine doses essential for maximum protection in adults.

"The Commonwealth has cut vaccination funding for GPs delivering boosters. This is making it very difficult for GPs to run clinics at the volume and scale required, including running extra vaccination clinics or extra sessions. GPs, for example, need to hire extra staff and make hundreds of telephone calls to encourage patients to get their boosters.

"Last week GPs around the country administered about 251,000 vaccine doses, including booster shots. Compare this to mid-October when GPs were administering about 975,000 vaccine doses each week.

“Unless primary care is supported, the booster program will fall further behind, and millions of Australians will be put at greater risk of the significant complications associated with COVID-19. The return of stringent public health restrictions will once again be inevitable.

“We need to be prepared for whatever COVID-19 throws at us, including making sure our vaccine infrastructure is capable of responding to threats like Omicron. It is too soon for us to dismantle this infrastructure.”

**Doorstop 12:00 WST/15:00 AEDT,
Wednesday 15 December 2021
Wexford Medical Centre, (under cover)
Saint John of God Hospital
3 Barry Marshall Parade, Murdoch 6150 WA**

AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid will hold a doorstop interview with media outside the Wexford Medical Centre (under cover), St John of God Hospital, Murdoch, Perth.

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