



# MEDIA RELEASE

**Thursday, 21 September 2023**

## **Health services must be considered essential services to help crisis response**

Doctors and health services in rural and regional Australia must be classified as essential services to ensure patients are looked after both during and after a crisis, and greater efforts need to go into making sure our health system continues to function as part of an effective disaster response.

In a submission to a Commonwealth Department of Home Affairs consultation on crisis response, the Australian Medical Association has called on governments to declare health services in rural and regional areas essential services so they can get the immediate support they need following a crisis.

AMA President Professor Steve Robson said the Lismore floods showed how important it is for governments to formally designate medical and other healthcare services as essential services and ensure appropriate funding flows quickly and efficiently to support patients to access health services when disasters hit.

"I went to Lismore last year and I saw the devastation. There was a lack of infrastructure almost a year after the disaster. The AMA campaigned for a year before local healthcare services received funding. Funding needs to be provided to healthcare workers to look after patients who have survived so much loss and devastation."

The AMA's submission says there are also important lessons to be learned from the COVID-19 response on the value of consulting doctors to ensure the health impacts of crises are managed.

"We need to improve disaster planning arrangements and consult more effectively with key providers in our health system, like general practice, while making sure the health system has the supplies and equipment it needs to function effectively.

"Our National Medical Stockpile was put under immense pressure during COVID-19 and there is no doubt this had a detrimental impact on our response, particularly, the lack of access to personal protective equipment."

Professor Robson said health experts also have an important role in informing crisis response measures as well as being able to communicate with the public on important public health issues.

"We know there will be further crises, with climate-related events increasing in frequency and severity. Climate change is a health emergency, and we need coordinated response measures with healthcare professionals as part of the strategic mix."

The AMA's submission also outlines key areas in which the health profession can offer expert advice such as communication and coordination efforts, health service support, and community support.

"Doctors can help with public messaging and talking with other doctors and allied health professionals. They also know what health infrastructure is needed to provide continuity of care for patients.

"Doctors also need to be enabled to provide primary care through things like having access to Medicare benefits while practicing in temporary premises or having access to essential medicines and personal protection equipment."

[Read the AMA's submission.](#)

---

Contact: AMA Media: +61 427 209 753 [media@ama.com.au](mailto:media@ama.com.au)



[@ama\\_media](#)



[@amapresident](#)



[@medicalassociation\\_au](#)



[AustralianMedicalAssociation](#)



[@medicalassociation\\_au](#)