

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## Awareness week highlights danger of drug-resistant superbugs

World AMR Awareness Week alerts us to one of the most serious global health threats of the 21st century with superbugs and the silent pandemic of drug-resistant infections threatening to return health systems to the dark ages.

[World Antimicrobial Resistance Awareness Week](#), which begins today, highlights the spread of drug-resistant infections and the importance of safe and appropriate antimicrobial use.

Australian Medical Association President Dr Danielle McMullen says Australia faces a return to the medical dark ages if resistance to antimicrobials, including antibiotics, antivirals and antifungals, is not addressed.

"A superficial scratch could be life threatening and untreatable infections from minor injuries could become a leading cause of death by 2050," Dr McMullen said.

"Antimicrobial resistance was associated with 4.95 million deaths in 2019, with 1.27 million of those deaths directly attributable to a resistant bacterial infection. Over the coming decades it's predicted to become one of the leading causes of death and could be responsible for 50 million deaths each year by 2050.

"It's estimated that by 2050 the annual impact of antimicrobial resistance on the Australian economy will be between \$142 billion and \$283 billion and between \$80 and \$90 trillion worldwide. Now is the time for strong and sustained action on antimicrobial resistance."

Dr McMullen said the dangers of antimicrobial resistance should be front of mind for all governments when considering the expansion of prescribing rights for non-medical health professionals, as this had the very real potential to result in unnecessary or inappropriate use of antibiotics, with over prescribing contributing significantly to the risk of antimicrobial resistance in Australia.

"Antibiotics are an important part of medicine, but it is absolutely critical they are prescribed carefully and responsibly," Dr McMullen said.

The AMA's report [Antimicrobial resistance: the silent pandemic](#), says Australia is well placed to lead global efforts in supporting a coordinated approach to address antimicrobial resistance, particularly in the Asia Pacific region, to control the threat of resistant infections.

However, the report says Australia is lagging in several key areas, including public awareness and understanding of antimicrobial resistance; stewardship; coordination and incentives for research and development; and national One Health governance.

"The AMA has proposed several solutions that build on work the government is doing to encourage behavioural change, incentivise antimicrobial research and development and a unified approach to addressing antimicrobial resistance," Dr McMullen said.

"The federal government should work with the scientific and medical research community to combat super bugs through the new Australian Centre for Disease Control, which will provide scientific leadership and coordination of disease and health threats."

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Antibiotic resistance occurs when bacteria stop an antibiotic working effectively, meaning some infections may not be able to be treated. Misuse of antimicrobials can contribute to antimicrobial resistance.

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