

TRANSCRIPT

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Transcript: AMA Queensland President, Dr Nick Yim, Channel Nine Weekend Today, Sunday, 10 August 2025

Subjects: Chief Health Officer, Ekka flu vaccinations

CLINT STANAWAY: It's been more than 240 days now since Queensland had a permanent Chief Health Officer, and now the state has found itself in the midst of this deadly flu season.

ALISON PIOTROWSKI: With hospitals overwhelmed and a decision made to scrap a free vaccine clinic, the state's health system is at breaking point. Joining us is AMA Queensland President, Dr Nick Yim. Dr Yim, good to see you. How disruptive is it for Queensland to not have a permanent Chief Health Officer?

DR NICK YIM: Good morning. First and foremost, AMA Queensland, we've been engaging with the Chief Health Officer. While it's not a permanent role, the current role has always been filled and we've always had great engagement with the Chief Health Officer. They've been keeping us up to date. Just last night, I caught up with the Chief Health Officer and we spoke about the influenza issue in Queensland. The cases are rising, hospitalisations are rising due to influenza and that's due to the fact that many people aren't vaccinated. And that, unfortunately, is putting pressure on our healthcare system.

CLINT STANAWAY: Let's talk about that pressure, Dr Yim. We're told four major hospitals are now forced to cancel elective surgeries. Is the health system collapsing under this pressure?

DR NICK YIM: This is something that we've been highlighting now for many, months, even years. In the state of Queensland, across Australia, we are having workforce challenges. The reason why we had to postpone elective surgery was to give a bit of breathing space due to the fact that many people were coming into hospital needing beds due to influenza and other respiratory conditions. This is a big reason why AMA Queensland has developed a workforce plan that we've just delivered to the government to hopefully to have some strategies to recruit, retain and also attract doctors to the state of Queensland.

ALISON PIOTROWSKI: Dr Yim, given the low flu vaccination rate of under 28%, I'm confused about the decision to scrap the free clinic at the Ekka. Was that a mistake?

DR NICK YIM: The key thing here, based on previous years, the uptake of the influenza vaccine at the Ekka was quite low. I know that many people, when they go to the Ekka they probably don't prioritise the influenza vaccine. If they were going to get immunised, they probably would have done it already. I know when I was young, I'd rather be queuing up for showbags, the animals, the shows, as opposed to queuing up for immunisation.

CLINT STANAWAY: If lives are at risk, though, we need a solution.

ALISON PIOTROWSKI: We need to have many opportunities to be able to get vaccinated.

CLINT STANAWAY: Get the crisis under control. What's your take?

DR NICK YIM: In Queensland, we have the great luxury that the influenza vaccine is free for everyone. The population has many access points already such as general practices and pharmacies, and we know many of those places are open many hours a day, seven days a week. The message is always clear: it's never too late to vaccinate. So for those of you who haven't been immunised against the flu, please get vaccinated.

CLINT STANAWAY: Dr Yim from the AMA, thanks so much for your time.

DR NICK YIM: Always appreciate it. Thank you.

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