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BUSHFIRE SMOKE RESEARCH WILL HELP DOCTORS AND PATIENTS MANAGE FUTURE IMPACTS OF BUSHFIRES

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today that the findings of new bushfire smoke research will provide people with better knowledge of prevention measures and empower doctors with better clinical solutions to care for communities affected by future extreme bushfires and other air quality emergencies.

Health Minister, Greg Hunt, has announced \$5 million funding for research into both the physiological and mental health impacts of prolonged exposure to bushfire smoke on people and whole communities.

The announcement follows weeks of warnings in the media about air quality and the effects on human health from Dr Bartone and other AMA spokespeople. The AMA raised these concerns directly with the Health Minister.

Dr Bartone said that the short-term effects of hazardous air quality are well-researched, but the long-term effects of short and medium time periods of exposure are not well understood.

“The AMA has been extensively engaged in responding to both our patients and the wider public’s concerns about the impact of hazardous air on individual and population health over the last couple of months,” Dr Bartone said.

“General practitioners are treating people in fire-ravaged areas and other communities, and seeing first-hand those affected by the physical conditions and mental health consequences of ongoing exposure to hazardous air.

“However, the lack of clinical and public health research evidence about the long-term impacts of the kind of exposure to hazardous air we have seen in the last few months makes public education challenging.

“The AMA supports research that builds on existing knowledge on air quality and human health, in particular research on the impact of the 2019-20 bushfire crisis.

“Such research could assess national and international knowledge so that it can be applied into clinical and public health practice across Australia.

“We need to rapidly translate the research findings into everyday medical practice to facilitate comprehensive care and treatment and improve health literacy.

“The AMA would encourage extra funding, if needed, to allow researchers to complete this work ahead of any possible future emergencies,” Dr Bartone said.

Dr Bartone will be attending the Prime Minister’s bushfire response roundtable in Canberra this Friday, 17 January 2020.

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