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NEWMARCH HOUSE REPORT VINDICATES AMA CALLS FOR URGENT ASSESSMENTS OF ALL AGED CARE HOMES

The report on the Newmarch House COVID-19 outbreak vindicates the AMA’s calls for urgent assessments of all aged care homes to manage the pandemic, AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, said today.

The AMA has called for every residential aged care home in Australia to be urgently and comprehensively assessed for its ability to safely care for residents during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“In April, following reports from our members, we called for improved cohorting guidance in aged care homes. We argued that isolating infected residents in their rooms would not work, given the high virulence of COVID-19. The AMA also called for better engagement and coordination with GPs during outbreaks,” Dr Khorshid said.

The Newmarch report found that: *“Until COVID-19 positive residents were cohorted in one section in the home, with dedicated staff, they were a continued source of infection.”*

It also found that: *“Local general practitioners had an important but probably under-utilised role in the early weeks of the outbreak. Those who regularly cared for residents at Newmarch House were not immediately informed of the outbreak even when their patients were infected.”* This is unacceptable.

“We must learn the lessons from Newmarch and the outbreaks in aged care homes in Victoria. These lessons must be applied in the plan that the Government announced last Friday,” Dr Khorshid said.

“Sending healthy older people to hospital for isolation is not the solution. Triggers for transfers will have to be set, along with transfer destinations for each individual aged care home.

“To prevent these situations from happening elsewhere, there should be a single contact point for any aged care home that requires additional workforce clearly designated for each State and Territory. This information should be communicated to all providers.”

The role of GPs needs to be recognised as crucial in all aspects of care for nursing home residents. They must be involved.

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