

**Australian Medical Association Limited**

**ABN 37 008 426 793**

42 Macquarie Street, Barton ACT 2600: PO Box 6090, Kingston ACT 2604  
 Telephone: (02) 6270 5400 Facsimile (02) 6270 5499  
 Website : <http://www.ama.com.au/>



**THE HEALTH OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE MUST BE A PRIORITY IN COVID-19 RESPONSE**

The AMA is calling for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be a top priority in national measures to control COVID-19.

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a higher susceptibility to COVID-19 due to higher rates of underlying chronic diseases, overcrowded living conditions, lack of food security, inadequate income, and other social determinants of health, such as water.

“The AMA supports the Government’s significant funding to help combat COVID-19,” Dr Bartone said.

“This includes around \$50 million for telehealth services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and increased capacity for remote communities to prevent outbreaks through screening fly-in and fly-out workers, supporting the evacuation of early cases, and mobile respiratory clinics.”

Dr Bartone said that the AMA has heard from frontline doctors working in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that they are significantly under resourced, and will be unable to cope if COVID-19 spreads in these areas.

“If COVID-19 gets into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, particularly in remote areas, we face the prospect of not being able to provide proper care and we will see avoidable deaths,” an AMA doctor on the frontline said.

“Talk of ‘flattening the curve’ means nothing to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who cannot access basic health services, let alone proper medical responses to this pandemic.”

Dr Bartone said that AMA members are warning that contracted medical services, and their staff, are being withdrawn from Aboriginal communities.

“Doctors are telling the AMA that people are preparing for death and suffering because they do not have the resources to evacuate very ill people.

“The AMA is calling for the National Cabinet to urgently fund and resource Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander health services to ensure they can respond to COVID-19,” Dr Bartone said.

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CONTACT: John Flannery 02 6270 5477 / 0419 494 761  
 Maria Hawthorne 02 6270 5478 / 0427 209 753