

**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/>



**Transcript:** AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, Sky News, *Live Now with Ashleigh Gillon*, Monday 28 May 2018

**Subject:** AMA Presidency

---

**ASHLEIGH GILLON:** Over the weekend, the Australian Medical Association elected a new President, with Dr Tony Bartone taking over from his predecessor, Dr Michael Gannon. Dr Bartone joins us live now from Melbourne. Firstly, congratulations, Doctor, on your appointment. What's your priority for the organisation? What, in your view, needs to be the top point of importance for you to raise at your first meeting with the Health Minister, Greg Hunt?

**TONY BARTONE:** Good morning and thank you for those thoughts, Ash. Look, the important thing that we will need to raise is that the [audio skip] clear message from our Conference, that basically we need to see a much more significant investment in health in the time ahead, especially in the lead-up to the next election, and we want to see health made a first-order election issue at the next election. We want to see an investment, we want to see a commitment to drive further reform in our health services, and we really, really want to have that conversation with the Minister in the weeks ahead.

But it's important to also be very clear that there was a specific message from our Conference on the weekend, and that was one of access and equity, and also of training our future workforce, and, of course, of a significant targeted investment in general practice, which has been the subject of significant underfunding and cuts to that funding over the last decade or more.

**ASHLEIGH GILLON:** Dr Bartone, we've seen some very different AMA Presidents in recent years, from the left and right side of politics, down the middle. Do you characterise yourself as falling into either camp, and do you plan to be a so-called activist president? Will you be tackling some of the more controversial policy areas like Australia's treatment of asylum seekers for example?

**TONY BARTONE:** Look, I don't put myself in either camp. I put myself in the shoes of the average patient who comes to see me, who has problems accessing health care in terms of the public hospital waiting lists, in terms of access to other areas or interventions or procedures, in terms of affordable private health insurance. They're the things that I'll be raising. I'll be putting myself in their shoes, and I'll do what I can to advocate on behalf of my patients, and of course for the doctors who are providing that quality care to them.

**ASHLEIGH GILLON:** Do you have serious concerns, though, about the welfare of people still lingering on Manus and Nauru? I know your predecessor spoke quite openly about his concerns for their mental health.

**TONY BARTONE:** And of course we have a clear set of guidelines about the way we would expect people in detention centres on Nauru to be treated. There are international conventions and we expect their treatment to be no less than that minimum that's required.

**ASHLEIGH GILLON:** We saw a historic vote in Ireland over the weekend regarding women's rights to have an abortion. Do you think it's time for Australia to reconsider our

abortion laws? In particular, do you share concerns about the fact that women in Tasmania are currently being forced to travel to the mainland to access that service?

**TONY BARTONE:** A couple of things to say there. I understand that Ireland are starting from a much, much more conservative position than is generally the case in Australia. The other thing is that we really shouldn't have a situation where women are having to travel across State boundaries to access a healthcare service.

But at the heart of all of this, this also means that whatever the reform, whatever the opportunity, we should always respect the issue around conscientious objection and pressuring doctors to perform medical procedures that they don't agree in from an ethical point of view. So it's about marrying all those things up and ensuring that we proceed accordingly in those various State jurisdictions. But we don't want to see, obviously, patients having to cross State boundaries.

**ASHLEIGH GILLON:** Yeah, it doesn't seem to make a lot of sense. Just finally, we saw over the weekend as well that the Government had to order in an extra 800,000 flu vaccines. The Opposition's raised a few concerns about this, suggesting that the Government really underestimated demand for this year's flu vaccine, when they should have seen that demand coming. Were you worried about that?

**TONY BARTONE:** Look, it's obviously a difficult area. They did "up" the supply and logistics chain for this anticipated increase in demand. There was a very strong campaign to get everyone vaccinated, there was obviously a very significant scare from last year's flu epidemic. But what we probably have seen [indistinct] competitive pressures between the private market and obviously the Government's supply that goes through our GP clinics. And so really, I think there would be a lot of learnings out of the first few months of this year, and I hope we don't see that replicated again, and I'll certainly be bringing that up with the Minister when I see him.

**ASHLEIGH GILLON:** Dr Tony Bartone, no doubt we'll be seeing you a lot more here on Sky News following this appointment. Congratulations again and thanks for joining us on Sky this morning.

**TONY BARTONE:** Thank you very much, Ash.

28 May 2018

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

Follow the AMA Media on Twitter: [http://twitter.com/ama\\_media](http://twitter.com/ama_media)

Follow the AMA President on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/amapresident>

Follow *Australian Medicine* on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/amaausmed>

Like the AMA on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/AustralianMedicalAssociation>