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**PANDEMIC SPENDING AT CENTRE OF BUDGET**

Federal AMA President Dr Omar Khorshid has commended the Federal Government’s \$16 billion COVID-19 health response and further stimulus spending aimed at fending off a COVID-19 recession.

“The health and economic impacts of COVID-19 warrant this scale of health response and stimulus spending directed toward restarting the economy,” Dr Khorshid said.

“The Budget commits \$1.1 billion to a COVID-19 vaccine arriving by next July and assumes any further COVID-19 outbreaks will be localised and contained.

“A safe, effective and widely available vaccine is not guaranteed for next year and if it doesn’t eventuate and a large outbreak occurs, economic recovery will be threatened, along with mention many Australian lives.

“The Government needs to be willing to rethink scaling back *JobSeeker* and *JobKeeper* if a vaccine-led economic recovery is delayed or doesn’t eventuate.

“Governments cannot drop the ball and must continue a broad range of strong policies to keep COVID-19 out of the community in order to ensure a sustained health and economic recovery.”

In specific health portfolio measures, Dr Khorshid commended the Government for:

- Essential continued funding to support the COVID-19 response in hospitals, pathology testing services, GP respiratory clinics and temporary COVID-19 telehealth services;
- Retaining \$448 million for patient enrolment in General Practices;
- \$2 billion over four years in expanded aged care, with \$1.6 billion for 23,000 new home care packages and \$103 million for COVID-19 residential care outbreak preparedness;
- Increasing the number of Medicare funded mental health consultations from 10 to 20;
- Extending eligibility from 24 to 31 years for adult children to remain as dependents on their parent’s private health insurance policies.

“Sound decisions have been made tonight. The Government has retained its commitment to enrolling patients in General Practice by preserving \$448 million for the deferred patient enrolment program,” Dr Khorshid said.

“It’s also taken a modest step to continue health insurance for younger people by adjusting ages of children able to use private health services through their parent’s health cover.

“Minister Hunt has committed to actuarial review of private health reform proposals outlined in the AMA’s *Prescription for Private Health* report. We’ll get to work through these reforms this month.

“Beyond these modest measures, the Budget has left most other challenges in health care for another day. More is needed on preventive health. More is needed on long term public hospital funding. Private health is facing viability issues, and General Practice in particular needs help now,” Dr Khorshid said.

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