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**New Medicare funding for vaccination welcome,  
 but still more to do**

The AMA has welcomed the Government’s announcement of new Medicare funding for GPs to vaccinate patients against COVID-19 during home visits and visits to aged care facilities, but warned more is needed to address vaccine hesitancy in those patients over 50 years of age.

AMA President Dr Omar Khorshid said “It is critical we complete the job of vaccinating the most vulnerable in the community as soon as possible. This measure will help plug the current gaps in COVID vaccination in aged care facilities.

“However, the biggest issue right now is vaccine hesitancy in the over 50s. AMA has been working with the Minister for Health and his Department to allow vaccine hesitant Australians time for a proper discussion with a GP about COVID vaccination.

“Current Medicare funding only supports brief consultations. Yet GPs may need to spend up to thirty minutes for some patients to discuss their specific circumstances and ensure they understand the benefits of COVID vaccination. When this occurs, most Australians decide to go ahead and get vaccinated.”

Dr Khorshid said GPs had done “a wonderful job in lifting vaccination rates across the country, with the vaccine roll out accelerating significantly since general practice became involved.”

“But the job is nowhere near done and GPs need the Government’s support to take our over 50s vaccine program to the next level.

“The Government needs to assure patients that if they need to spend more time with their GP discussing COVID-19 and vaccination, Medicare will cover this extra time with a GP in the interests of all Australians.

“The AMA urges Government to continue to listen to the experts and urgently make this further investment in the vaccine program in order to encourage the most vulnerable Australians to be covered against COVID as we head further into winter.”

The new funding announced by Minister Hunt for GPs to vaccinate Australians in Residential Aged Care and at home provides a mechanism to vaccinate residents and workers who missed out in the first round or who have entered a facility recently.

“Residential aged care homes have seen significant COVID outbreaks, and it is important vaccination rates remain very high in these facilities to keep residents safe,” Dr Khorshid said.

“It will now also be easier for patients to get vaccinated when they cannot get to their local GP. This will help those with mobility problems unable to leave their homes easily and support more people in disability accommodation access vaccination via a GP,” he said.

Dr Khorshid said importantly the new Medicare items would ensure new residents entering aged care could access vaccination via their usual GP, or a GP organised by the facility, ensuring the ongoing protection of all vulnerable Australians living in aged care.

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