

# RACGP steps up calls for nation-wide vaccine advertising campaign - RACGP

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The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) is strengthening its calls for the federal Government to urgently ramp up a campaign to boost vaccine confidence in the community.

The RACGP has [previously stressed](#) the importance of national targeted messaging and advertising for specific cohorts to clear up mixed messages and encourage more eligible people to get vaccinated. This is particularly important in the context of recent changes to AstraZeneca vaccine eligibility and patient concerns about vaccine safety.

It comes following an RACGP member survey conducted this month, which asked GPs what needs to be improved in the rollout of mRNA vaccines to general practice (e.g. Pfizer vaccine) based on their experiences with the AstraZeneca vaccine rollout.

92% of members said that improvement was needed in relation to “public awareness and education”, including almost 70% of respondents who reported that “significant improvement” was necessary.

That same survey revealed that more than half of respondents considered the overall effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout in Australia “somewhat ineffective” or “very ineffective”.

RACGP President Dr Karen Price said that the survey results should act as a strong wakeup call.

“GPs on the frontline delivering these vaccines see that more action is needed,” she said.

“This country urgently needs a comprehensive, well-targeted, nation-wide campaign to boost vaccine confidence in the community.

“Unless our campaign is large-scale and effective, negative vaccination commentary and conspiracy theories will have a far greater impact on vaccination rates than should be the case.

“We must reach everyone, so the campaign must be carefully tailored so it speaks to different groups of people based on their circumstances and needs.

“If we wait for supply to increase before ramping up a campaign, we are risking more people becoming hesitant in the meantime.

“We need to clear up the confusion and build confidence in the vaccine now so we can get jabs in arms quickly as supply increases. This job is urgent, we need to get the population vaccinated as fast as we can to protect the community and avoid lockdowns.

“The campaign must include targeted advertisements and promotional materials for GPs to have conversations with all Australians. For example, younger women may have specific questions about pregnancy or fertility, so the campaign needs specific information that will help them.

“Trusted medical professionals in lab coats speaking to camera can be useful, but we need to do more to cut through to those who are hesitant. If we can get the right kind of creative people thinking outside the box and coming up with fresh ideas that cut through and make a measurable impact on all the different cohorts that will make a real difference.

“We must get creative and consider all options, such as the use and influence of celebrities and sports stars. We need social media and digital content that people will want to click on and share with their friends and family – it needs to grab their attention.

“It is also vital to have a diverse range of spokespeople from different backgrounds and to use a range of different communication channels – especially the savvy use of digital and social media.”

Dr Price said that clearing up community confusion and uncertainty was more important now than ever.

“Many people across Australia, including GPs, are learning of new changes to the rollout, including eligibility for the AstraZeneca vaccine, and becoming understandably frustrated and suffering from information overload,” she said.

“Government must try and explain that the rollout will change as new evidence emerges but that that is no cause for alarm. As our understanding of the science changes, our approach to the rollout changes.

“A key priority for the campaign must be addressing perceptions of the AstraZeneca vaccine. It is not an inferior vaccine; it is a safe vaccine and if you are eligible to receive it - you should do so right away.

“As a practicing GP, I am listening to some of my patients well into their 70s or older tell me that they are going to wait. We need to explain to them that this is a dangerous approach because this age group has a one in 10 chance of dying if they contract COVID-19.

“In contrast, the chances of contracting the rare clotting syndrome associated with the AstraZeneca vaccine is one in the tens of thousands.

“This is a public health emergency of a lifetime. The pandemic is not over, and we do not know when more outbreaks will occur and how severe they will be and where the next hard lockdown will occur.

“So now is the time for the Government to step up and work harder to communicate to Australians why delaying or avoiding getting the vaccine is so much riskier than getting vaccinated. We are now in the winter months and the situation is only going to get riskier. The time to act is now.”

~ENDS

RACGP spokespeople are available for interview.

## **Media contacts**

### **John Ronan**

Media Adviser

0428 122 357

[media@racgp.org.au](mailto:media@racgp.org.au)

### **Ally Francis**

Media Adviser

0499 555 712

[media@racgp.org.au](mailto:media@racgp.org.au)

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## **About the RACGP**

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) was established in 1958 and is Australia's peak general practice representative organisation.

The RACGP has more than 41,000 members working in or towards a career in general practice, more than 9,500 of them live and work in rural and remote areas of the country. Nine in every 10 GPs are with the RACGP.