



# AIDA

The Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association  
ABN: 84 131 668 936

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## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Indigenous Doctors reinforce need for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to get vaccinated in wake of first death in the community**

The Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA) is deeply saddened to hear about the death of a 50-year-old Aboriginal man in Dubbo who succumbed to COVID-19 this week.

Our heartfelt condolences go out to his family and the broader Aboriginal community in western NSW. It is believed that he is the first Aboriginal person to die of COVID in Australia.

"The Aboriginal community-controlled sector has been working extremely hard to avoid this outcome; it was the news we were hoping we would never have to hear," said Dr Simone Raye, Vice President of AIDA.

"There is a lesson from this sad outcome. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities must be prioritised for the vaccine rollout and other health services related to COVID-19."

In the wake of this news, AIDA is reinforcing its message to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to get vaccinated against COVID-19 as soon as possible.

"We have seen how infectious and dangerous the Delta strain of COVID-19 is," Dr Raye said. "We need to make sure that our families and our communities are protected against COVID by getting vaccinated."

AIDA acknowledges that mixed messaging around certain vaccines being harmful to certain age groups has compounded the issue and contributed to vaccine hesitancy among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is important that the community understands the effectiveness of both vaccines.

"Both vaccines (Astra-Zenica and Pfizer) that we have here in Australia are safe and effective measures against COVID. It is especially important to get vaccinated if you already have other health issues," Dr Raye said.

"If you are worried about getting a vaccine, we urge you to speak to your doctor to be assured what is right for you. You can protect yourself as well as your family – especially vulnerable family members and our Elders."

AIDA is deeply concerned about COVID-19 spreading into other remote Aboriginal communities that are particularly vulnerable to the disease, and already struggle with resources and overcrowding in homes.

"We are also cautious about the idea of 'living with COVID' if our communities cannot be fully vaccinated in accordance with the Doherty Institute modelling. That is, if the 70-80% vaccination rate is made up of people living in larger cities, that potentially exposes people in rural/remote areas who may not have had opportunity to be vaccinated," Dr Raye said.

"AIDA is calling for 90-95% vaccination rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people before we can 'live with COVID'," Dr Raye stressed.

AIDA also supports the need to empower the Aboriginal community-controlled health sector to take the lead in the vaccine rollout in these communities.

"Our communities need to see people they can trust," Dr Raye said.

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Interviews are available upon request.

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