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**ALICE SPRINGS NEEDS ‘DISASTER DECLARATION’ TO HELP
 COVID ACCOMMODATION CRISIS**

***Federal Government must also step in to provide safe isolation and quarantine
 facilities for Indigenous COVID cases***

The Federal AMA and AMA Northern Territory have urged the NT government to trigger its emergency disaster response to provide crisis accommodation to COVID-positive cases with nowhere to isolate.

The AMA says Central Australia’s Indigenous community is worst affected as COVID-positive individuals are often ejected from already over-crowded households fearing the infection of more vulnerable family members.

The Territory and Federal AMA are also calling for the federal government to step in to provide safe isolation and quarantine accommodation in Alice Springs as existing facilities aren’t culturally sound for Indigenous patients.

“We have joined calls made by leading Aboriginal organisations to the NT government to provide culturally appropriate crisis accommodation for COVID-positive people but sadly those calls have fallen on deaf years,” AMA NT President Dr Robert Parker said.

“The bulk of the Territory’s COVID Cases are in the Indigenous community and there will be an ongoing need for culturally appropriate supported accommodation throughout the entire duration of the pandemic. The only option – the Alice Springs Quarantine Facility (ASQF) - is not one that works for Indigenous people.

“Many of our more vulnerable people live quite chaotic lives and the rigid isolation and protocols of the ASQF are not going to work for this group, nor are they wanted. That doesn't mean they don't need help – we just need to provide help that suits their needs.

“Emergency accommodation and social support, along with a Code Brown alert, will help relieve some pressure on our hospitals which are under enormous strain. Staff are exhausted, nursing shortages are crippling, and we rely on double shifts to get through. Alice Springs Hospital, like RDH, is bursting at the seams and the backlog of elective surgery is staggering. We will likely see increased morbidity associated with delays to treatment.

“COVID is bringing to bear the failings of long-term housing and homelessness, left unaddressed for decades. No other group would be expected to live in squalid conditions with 20 to 30 people in a three-bedroom house, but this has been normalised for Indigenous people. It’s a failure of public policy that needs to be addressed,” Dr Parker said.

AMA national president, Dr Omar Khorshid, said the NT was failing its most vulnerable people.

“There needs to be a better plan than disaster management for the Northern Territory and impact of COVID in its remote communities. Omicron will not be the last variant to arrive, and that the accommodation crisis it has caused has not been addressed in scandalous.

“If a disaster declaration is what’s needed, the NT government should declare it, which would mean the federal government could also respond with assistance.

“In any case the Commonwealth should provide quarantine facilities in Alice Springs that suit the whole community,” Dr Khorshid said.

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