

JOINT media release



Australian
Nursing &
Midwifery
Federation
VICTORIAN BRANCH



VICTORIAN
ALLIED HEALTH
PROFESSIONALS
ASSOCIATION



VICTORIAN
AMBULANCE
UNION



Victorian patients more important than getting on the beers

FRIDAY 17 SEPTEMBER 2021

Victorian nurses, midwives, paramedics, doctors, and allied health professionals are calling on the Andrews Government to apply extreme caution and put lives and the capacity of the workforce and health system first as it makes decisions about easing restrictions and opening up.

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (Victorian Branch), the Victorian Ambulance Union, the Australian Medical Association Victoria, the Australian Salaried Medical Officers' Federation, and the Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association, representing almost 120,000 health care workers, are calling on Premier Daniel Andrews to ensure that the Government's decisions are based on:

1. what is best for the health of Victorians
2. accurate modelling
3. what our dedicated health professionals can safely manage.

Premier Andrews must continue to not succumb to the pressures of those advocating to ease restrictions – whatever the cost.

The Commonwealth Government and National Cabinet re-opening plans are based on the widely debated Doherty model of 80 per cent vaccination of the eligible population aged over 16 years. This is 60 per cent of the total population. The model does not consider the impact on the 40 per cent of unvaccinated Australians (the 20 percent 16 years and above and those under 16 years of age) or examine vulnerable groups including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

As Victoria's COVID positive numbers climb we are seeing hundreds of Victorians admitted to Hospital in the Home (HITH) COVID services, increasing hospital and intensive care admissions and longer stays to recover. We need accurate modelling for expected ambulance demand, hospitalisations, intensive care patients and deaths due to the Delta variant into the future.

Modelling must also detail the impact on access to health services for non-COVID-related patients such as heart attacks, stroke and surgery.

Nurses, doctors and other health professionals are currently caring for and treating more than 300 COVID patients in the HITH program and almost 200 hospital patients, including 51 in intensive care. Less than three weeks ago we had 27 patients in hospital and 12 in intensive care.

We are creating new mental health programs to ease pressure on emergency departments and mental health services. We are transferring COVID positive pregnant women, from across the state, to two metropolitan services.

Victoria's health professionals are burning out and are rightly fearful that as numbers increase as restrictions ease our hospitals will be full of COVID patients and non-COVID patients will find it difficult to access a bed. We need Premier Andrews to hold the line and ensure our health system is not overwhelmed as COVID cases rise.

Quotes attributable to Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (Victorian Branch) Secretary Lisa Fitzpatrick

'Victoria is doing everything it can to prepare, we have a surge workforce working across 60 vaccination hubs and almost 250 testing sites, nurses have completed critical care education, we have extra beds and ventilators.

What we haven't been able to do is give our exhausted nursing and midwifery workforce a break to properly re-charge. They now approach the next peak deeply, deeply fatigued.

Business interests and people's desire to get back to normal is understandable. But surely a beer in the pub or a coffee in a café cannot happen at the cost of exhausted healthcare workers wearing uncomfortable tier 3 PPE shift, after shift in a health system making impossible decisions about who gets a bed and spiralling deaths each week.'

Quotes attributable to Victorian Ambulance Union General Secretary Danny Hill

'We all want to get on the beers, believe me. But more than anything we want our health workers and their patients to be safe. Today we have 29 COVID patients on ventilators and it takes an army of health workers to keep them alive. We all of our health workers safe and able to work so they can continue to save lives.'

Quotes attributable to Australian Medical Association Victoria President and Australian Salaried Medical Officers' Federation Federal Assistant Secretary Dr Roderick McRae

'COVID-19 is putting unprecedented strain on Victoria's health care system and now is not the time to open up.

Stress is being felt across the system including in primary care, HITH outreach care for COVID-19 patients, and caring for admitted patients both with COVID-19 and other medical illnesses.

AMA Victoria considers it reckless to open up the current Victorian restrictions until 80 percent of people 12 years and older, who are now eligible for vaccination, are two weeks beyond their second dose. That is the time to reassess the state's capacity to manage the inevitable cases of COVID-19 in the remaining 1.6 million unvaccinated Victorian citizens.

The healthcare system is currently stressed related to general practice exposure and COVID-19 hospital spread in hospitals, resulting in loss of important medical, nursing and allied healthcare staff. These staff also can be exposed to COVID-19 in their domestic and community situations, including other family or household members or child education facilities

AMA Victoria understands the implications of its policy but there are no simple solutions related to the management of COVID-19. This is simply the least bad option.'

Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association Assistant Secretary Andrew Hewat

'This has been a long, tough and incredibly stressful 18 months for healthcare workers. The impact on their mental and physical wellbeing has been huge. We need the Premier to hold the line and maintain strong public health measures to help keep the pressure on the hospitals and the healthcare workers as low as possible.

'We must stop counting bed capacity and start looking at healthcare worker capacity, both mental and physical. Healthcare workers are at breaking point. You have no health system without health professionals to run it.

"We have never seen allied health professionals as stressed and burnt out as we are currently seeing. Many were suffering workload stress before COVID hit. The pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities in our health system, and we need to do everything possible to protect healthcare workers, so they can continue to protect and care for Victorians.'

ends

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