



COVID-19 MEMBER UPDATE

Prof Walter Abhayaratana
AMA ACT President

24 August 2021

Dear colleague

With the current COVID-19 outbreak in the ACT, I wanted to get in touch and draw your attention to some important matters and information for you and your practice. While first and most important of these is in regard to looking after your own health and wellbeing, I wanted to touch on some other issues too:

- Health and wellbeing
- Small business support
- Information for public hospital doctors and medical students
- Clear documentation needed for over-60s and Pfizer
- Retired doctors volunteering to assist with the COVID-19 response

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Firstly, I wanted to emphasise the need to take care of your own health and wellbeing, and that of your family, colleagues, and practice staff, as you provide care to your patients. It's essential that our healthcare workers stay healthy and are able to deliver the care that our community needs.

Locally, the Doctors Health Advisory Service (DHAS) operates a 24/7 phone help line that offers personal advice to medical practitioners and students facing difficulties. Medical practitioners concerned about their own health, the health of a colleague or family member who is a doctor or medical student, can call the DHAS for advice.

DHAS is a confidential service that provides doctors and medical students with the opportunity to talk about the challenges they face. Callers often seek advice in relation to stress, mental health issues, drug and alcohol problems, career crises and personal and relationship difficulties.

The DHAS help line is 02 9437 6552.

Another very good resource is the website at drs4drs.com.au where you'll find information on available services (that include DHAS) and telemedicine options, both undertaken confidentially. In addition, there are learning modules and a resource hub to further assist.

SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT

The ACT Government is in the process of establishing small business support grants for businesses operating in the ACT. The main features of this ACT assistance program are:

- Grants of up to \$10,000 over the current 3-week ACT lock-down period in the form of payroll tax credits, reduced utilities charges, concessional rates and reduced licence fees may also be available
- Businesses will be eligible if it can be shown that a 30% decline in turnover has occurred over the lock-down period
- While assistance will be directed towards those sectors of the ACT economy most directly impacted by the lock-down, such as hospitality, accommodation, tourism, and building & construction, more information on the business support will be released shortly and we will notify members when that occurs
- Access to business hardship grants will also be available subject to conditions.

More information [here](#).

Assistance for Practice Employees

Employees who are unable to derive income due to the ACT-wide lock-down may be eligible to access to the [Commonwealth](#) COVID Disaster payment through the **Services Australia** website. Payments ranging from \$200 to \$750 per week are available under this scheme.

More information [here](#).

Vaccination of Practice Staff

As most practice owners will be aware, mandatory vaccination of practice staff is a complex issue. We will publish some further advice over the next few days but meanwhile, there are

some very good resources for practice principals, and doctors who are engaged as contractors or employees, on the Avant website:

<https://www.avant.org.au/covid-19/vaccination-fags/>

PUBLIC HOSPITAL DOCTORS AND MEDICAL STUDENTS

While the obvious focus is on preparation for and dealing COVID-19 positive patients while continuing to undertake care of other patients, the enterprise agreement negotiations continue.

The most recent negotiating meeting was held on 12 August and dealt with a variety of our Doctors in Training claims loosely grouped into the concept of 'working hours'. Several of our claims have now moved into the 'agreed in principle' column, including:

- guaranteed consecutive days off
- penalty rate eligibility for using technology when on call instead of physical recall and
- improved management (and cashing out) of ADOs.

While this represents progress, don't forget that it's subject to 'the detail' being agreed and the adequacy of the final total package offer from CHS and Calvary Public Hospital.

Our claims with respect to rosters and managing excessive hours of work have seen us provide a number of materials about AMA Safe Hours National Code of Practice. Our claims about fair roster posting rules remain on the table and were also discussed on 12 August.

The full AMA ACT Enterprise Agreement claims can be viewed [here](#).

ANU Medical Students Assisting with COVID-19

I've been pleased to work with the Director of the ANU Medical School, Professor Zsusoka Kesckes, to ensure that our student doctors are included in the call-out for assistance with COVID-19 efforts, including vaccine provision, contact tracing, and COVID-19 testing. Of the 400-plus ANU medical students, 98% are COVID-19 vaccinated, and the students are eager to join the health workforce during these challenging times to ensure that they play their part during the pandemic.

At this point, a new role of Medical Student – COVID Worker, has been developed to facilitate the involvement of 3rd and 4th students in the ACT COVID response. Further information will be forthcoming very shortly from Canberra Health Services and ACT Health.

CLEAR DOCUMENTATION NEEDED FOR OVER-60s AND PFIZER

I have been approached by GP colleagues to reach out to our members and remind them of the ATAGI guidelines regarding the criteria for patients who are 60 years or over who would be eligible for the Pfizer vaccine because of conditions that render them unsuitable for the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccination. If a specialist tells a patient >60yr that they should be able to get have Pfizer vaccine rather than AstraZeneca, then the specialist needs to clearly document, preferably in the correspondence to the patient's GP, which one of the known exclusion criteria the patient has, including the following conditions as per the ATAGI guidance update from the 30 July 2021:

- A past history of cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST)
- A past history of heparin-induced thrombocytopenia (HIT)
- A past history of idiopathic splanchnic (mesenteric, portal and splenic) venous thrombosis
- Anti-phospholipid syndrome with thrombosis
- People with contraindications to COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca, i.e.
 - Anaphylaxis to a previous dose of COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca, or to an ingredient of the vaccine
 - Capillary Leak Syndrome
 - Thrombosis with thrombocytopenia occurring after the first dose of COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca
 - Other serious adverse events attributed to the first dose of COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca

RETIRED DOCTORS VOLUNTEERING TO ASSIST WITH THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

Last week the AMA ACT office was contacted by retired and non-practising members wishing to assist by volunteering their time to the local COVID-19 response. While Canberra Health Services and ACT Health are keen to ensure they have access to a workforce capable of meeting the potential demand, it will take a short while to work out how the volunteers can be utilised. In our view, the potential roles for retired and non-practising could range from vaccination and testing related work to contact tracing and other matters.

CHS have requested that any volunteers please forward their contact details and CV or brief resume to Terry Keel at Terry.Keel@act.gov.au or call Terry on 02 51246140.

It would be appreciated if you could also provide your information to AMA ACT in order that we can alert you to other opportunities that may arise at execofficer@ama-act.com.au or on 0417 047 764.

If you need assistance on any of these matters, please get in contact with the AMA ACT office on 02 6270 5410 or reception@ama-act.com.au

Best wishes

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President, AMA ACT