



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Calls for 'reserve' doctors to be deployed during pandemic**

Retired doctors could help Queensland with COVID-19 vaccinations and fill gaps in aged care during the pandemic, according to AMA Queensland's Senior Active Doctor Working Group.

Head of the group, Associate Professor Geoffrey Hawson said retired doctors were ready, willing and able to step up and give medically qualified help where it was needed during the pandemic.

"What we need is a co-ordinated system to roll out a 'reserve' force of doctors in times of need, such as this pandemic, future pandemics and natural disasters," Dr Hawson said.

"In the most recent Brisbane lockdown, there were about 400 health workers out of action because they had to isolate. It's time to engage the medical expertise of retired doctors to deal with situations like this."

Dr Hawson said the group is researching the possibility of a new registration category for senior doctors that would enable them to help support a strained medical workforce.

"Usually, once a doctor gives up registration with AHPRA they are no longer able to practise medicine, but when the pandemic occurred, AHPRA allowed those who had retired in the previous three years to join the Pandemic Sub-register," Dr Hawson said.

In April 2021, the scope of their practice was changed to "vaccination only" and anyone who had retired since the sub-register was established could no longer apply to be on it. This effectively lost 300 Queensland doctors to the possibility of giving vaccination assistance, and another 300 are due to cease registration in October.

Brisbane paediatric surgeon Dr Rosslyn Walker, who retired in 2017, is one of those keen to answer the call.

Dr Walker has already completed the mandatory Commonwealth COVID-19 Vaccination Training required to deliver vaccinations at a GP's surgery and is ready and willing to help.

"If delivering the vaccine rollout in a timely manner is a workforce issue, then I am happy to help out," Dr Walker said.

"As retired doctors, if we are able to use our knowledge and skills, that's a good way for us to direct our time, keep our brains and our interest active and keep in touch with colleagues."

Dr Hawson said retired doctors were capable of much more than just helping with vaccination and should be able to do so.



“Some GPs would like this vaccination assistance, but others would prefer help with their respiratory clinics. Sub-register doctors are unable to do this because of the restrictions of the sub-register scope of practice, despite obviously being capable of it,” he said.

The research paper developed by the Senior Active Doctor Working Group will help guide an AMA Queensland position statement on senior doctor registration and be a key issue discussed with the Queensland Government and Queensland Health in the coming months.