

COVID-19

RURAL AND REMOTE RESPONSE

Media release

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Queensland pharmacy trial: making it easier to get COVID testing... or making it easier to get COVID?

A Queensland Government trial to enable pharmacies in the state to undertake COVID testing is a recipe for disaster and a sure-fire way to spread the virus, Australia's peak rural medical bodies warned again today.

The Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) and Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) said it would be "incredibly difficult" to control the spread of the virus in pharmacies, if customers with symptoms attend pharmacies to be tested.

Serious concerns about the trial have also been raised by the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia, the Queensland branch of Professional Pharmacists Australia, the AMA and other medical organisations.

"It is beyond crazy for the Queensland Government to push ahead with this trial, when even much of the pharmacy profession is warning against it" **ACRRM President, Dr Ewen McPhee, said.**

"Pharmacies themselves have been working hard since the start of the pandemic to urge those with COVID symptoms to stay home and get tested, rather than visit their pharmacies.

"Yet the Queensland Government and Pharmacy Guild are now saying 'if you have COVID symptoms, it is okay to visit a pharmacy to get tested' – this is not only dangerous to other customers, many of whom have chronic illnesses, but also to pharmacy staff.

"In other settings like respiratory clinics and general practices, COVID testing is undertaken away from other patients, typically via separate entrances. Many general practices are also screening all patients prior to entry to their practices, and ensuring social distancing in their waiting rooms.

"Achieving this in pharmacies is virtually impossible, meaning potential COVID patients will be in close proximity to other customers."

RDAA President, Dr John Hall, said: "While the Queensland Government says testing in pharmacies will 'make it easier to get COVID testing', they may as well just say they are 'making it easier to get COVID'.

"This trial has real potential to be for Queensland what hotel quarantine was for Victoria – a tragically wrong turn in the road.

"With all the promotion the Queensland Health Minister has been giving the trial, many people will assume they can turn up at any pharmacy to get a COVID test. This is a recipe for disaster.

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“It’s time to get real – there are already many COVID testing clinics in place across Queensland, and where there is a genuine need for more testing, hours will be increased.

“Rural pharmacists are a highly valued member of the healthcare team in rural communities, and work with GPs and Rural Generalist doctors to provide high quality care.

“Many of our rural doctor members say pharmacists in their communities are extremely concerned at the push for COVID testing to be undertaken in pharmacies.

“Many pharmacists don’t want this trial.

“Most pharmacy and medical organisations don’t want this trial.

“This trial has more potential to spread COVID than to help control it.

“So why push on with it?”

Find more information on how to protect yourself, your family and community from COVID-19 at www.health.gov.au.

A high resolution photo of ACRRM President, Dr Ewen McPhee, is available here:
<https://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/968>

A high resolution photo of RDAA President, Dr John Hall, is available here:
<https://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/687>

Available for interview:

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