

AMT Media Release

May 27, 2021

The Association of Massage Therapists (AMT) is joining the growing chorus of organisations calling on the Federal Government to fund purpose-built, air-gapped quarantine facilities to address the significant impacts of ongoing COVID-19 hotel quarantine leaks.

The call for purpose-built quarantine comes as AMT's Victorian members find themselves reliving the trauma of last year's extended lockdowns which saw many massage therapy businesses pushed to the brink.

Melbourne massage therapist, Liz Sharkey, says that many in Victoria are suffering from severe pandemic fatigue and are still carrying scars from the 2020 lockdowns.

"Last year, there was an element of 'ignorance is bliss'. We didn't really know what we were in for or how long the lockdown would last. This time around it's different," said Ms Sharkey. "We've done everything we have been asked to do and still restrictions are coming back. People are angry and confused. They want someone to blame.

"My business is only just starting to get back on track to where it was pre-Covid. Jobkeeper saved me last year. With no prospect of financial support now, I am not sure my business will survive. I just don't know if I have the heart to go through it again," Ms Sharkey said.

In March 2020, many massage therapists across Australia voluntarily closed their practices ahead of the national lockdown, recognising the risk of becoming vectors for transmission of COVID due to the close contact nature of the work.

"Our members take their responsibilities as healthcare practitioners extremely seriously," AMT's CEO, Rebecca Barnett said. "Not only did they voluntarily act to close down ahead of government lockdowns during the first wave of COVID but, with guidance from AMT, they have continued to be months ahead of the public health advice, adopting both droplet and airborne precautions in their clinics since reopening in June last year. They are using every possible strategy available to mitigate risks and protect their clients, including scheduling ventilation breaks between appointments, installing HEPA filters and monitoring CO2 levels to ensure there is adequate air exchange," said Ms Barnett.

"As an association that represents massage therapists, we recognise that it is a little bizarre to be weighing in on the issue of Australian quarantine arrangements but massage therapy is a close contact health intervention so practitioners are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of snap lockdowns and COVID outbreaks that continue to occur as a result of hotel quarantine leaks," Ms Barnett said.

"Without the safety net of JobKeeper, we are deeply concerned about the welfare of our members and the capacity to endure ongoing disruptions."

AMT Chairperson Subhadra Gerard is disappointed that the recent Federal Budget did not extend to funding purpose-built quarantine.

"This global pandemic is going to be a long-haul thing. There is no way our quarantine hotels will safely cope with the inevitable spike in case numbers from the thousands of stranded Australians returning here from COVID hotspots," Mr Gerard said.

"Australian massage therapists are doing their part to manage COVID-19 risks in the context of their clinical environments, with best-practice risk assessment protocols applicable over a range of clinical settings. Wouldn't it be great to see the Commonwealth government use a similar approach to provide us with best practice, purpose-built, air-gapped quarantine facilities," Mr Gerard said.

