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## Brisbane doctor warns drop in patients could have devastating outcomes

**Patients afraid of catching COVID-19 are avoiding medical appointments in such large numbers that Queensland's peak medical body says it could lead to "life-threatening" consequences.**

QUEENSLAND'S peak medical body has warned patients avoiding trips to the doctor and other medical appointments could have "life-threatening" consequences.

Australian Medical Association Queensland (AMAQ) president Dr Dilip Dhupelia confirmed it was clear many were postponing or avoiding trips to their GPs and other private specialists.

"AMAQ is very concerned that some Queenslanders are putting off seeing their doctor or getting a test, investigation, or immunisation due to fears of contracting COVID-19," he said.

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Dr Dhupelia said it was "undoubtedly having a concerning impact on the financial viability of the medical clinics" but more concerning to doctors was how it could affect people's health.

He said there had been a "large" reduction in investigative diagnostic tests, which could mean missing a diagnosis for cancer, endocrine disorders, diabetes and more.

"The consequences of not seeing your doctor for usual care could be life-threatening and could lead to the worsening of chronic conditions," he said.

He said telehealth was available for consultations and medical practices were ensuring the chances of coming into contact with the virus was "extremely low, if not negligible".

Chairs were being spaced 1.5m apart in waiting rooms, magazines and communal toys removed and separate areas for suspected COVID-19 patients established.

“We need to ensure that medical practices, like any other business, are ready to emerge on the other side of this crisis to continue delivering high quality patient care,” he said.

He said AMAQ had called for a simple break down of the help available of the measures available to help small to medium businesses.



A Brisbane GP says patient numbers at her clinic have dropped by 50 per cent. Picture: iStock

It comes as Family Doctors Plus director and GP Dr Maria Boulton said visits to her Windsor practice had dropped by 50 per cent amid the pandemic.

“We’re struggling like everybody else, with a difference that I think if people aren’t calling us, I’d hate to think what their health is doing,” she said.

“We don’t want any practices to close, that would be devastating for the community.”

“During a pandemic, not only do we have people dying from whatever virus is going around, but the death rate goes up in the rest of the community because of the reduced access to GPs.”

She said treating problems early led to better health outcomes.

“There’s people thinking ‘oh the doctor’s too busy, and my problem isn’t big enough. There’s people worse off than me’. It’s very Australian to say that,” she said.

“If you have chest pains, your doctor would rather hear about it now when it might be angina than in two weeks when it’s a heart attack.”

Dr Boulton said patients could have medical appointments via telehealth, which were bulk-billed and did not need any special equipment - just a phone.

She said patients who needed in-person appointments, like vaccinations, wound dressings, or pregnancy check-ups, could be assured her practice had taken all measures to ensure it was safe.