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Doctors call for urgent fix to PPE supply chain

GPs are urging federal and state governments to fix the supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) with many medical clinics unable to afford the thousands of dollars for masks and gowns to keep themselves, their patients and their staff safe.

Australian Medical Association (AMA) Queensland Councillor and practising GP Dr Maria Boulton said her Windsor clinic had spent more than \$10,000 on PPE since March because the Commonwealth's PPE supply and distribution network was unreliable.

GP practices in the Greater Brisbane area are now considered 'moderate risk' under Queensland Health's new PPE guidelines, announced yesterday. Ms Boulton said this meant the clinic where she worked would need to provide masks for its 13 doctors and 15,000 patients.

"GPs have had poor access to PPE from the start of the pandemic and it's frustrating we find ourselves in the same position today as we were at the start of March with an unreliable supply chain and no transparency on availability," she said.

"We've been advised to source PPE through our private suppliers but they are hard to find and very expensive. Many GP clinics are already under financial strain because of the increased costs and decreased revenue during COVID.

"This will push many of them under."

Dr Boulton said Queensland Health advice that GPs should increase telehealth appointments to avoid the need for PPE was unhelpful.

"You can't immunise children or treat pregnant women or care for a whole range of patients via telehealth – there are always people that need to see a doctor in person," she said.

"The fact that telehealth must be bulk billed adds further pressure to already struggling clinics. Many smaller GP practices are having to close their doors."

Ms Boulton said GPs were committed to continuing to provide health care in their communities, but needed a greater level of support from all levels of government.

"Allowing those at the frontline of our primary health care to go unprotected and unsupported is unacceptable," she said.

AMA Queensland is working with Queensland Health and the primary care sector to ensure clear and transparent communication to all frontline health workers in the community regarding access to and distribution of PPE.

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