Media release

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New tool in fight against coronavirus – COVIDSafe App launched

Peak rural medical bodies have said that the Government's new Contact Tracing App, COVIDSafe, is an important additional tool in the fight against COVID-19.

Dr Adam Coltzau, Clinical Lead of the COVID Rural and Remote Response, said the app, and the nation-wide expansion of testing, are important containment measures that will enable the government to start relaxing restrictions.

"The focus is on minimising outbreaks and containing them quickly, as well as keeping the number of positive tests as low as possible," Dr Coltzau.

"The eligibility requirements for testing have been expanded across all states, with the number of tests being conducted growing on a daily basis. This is a key element in the containment strategy.

"We need to act quickly on positive tests, and to do that we need speedy test results available everywhere – including rural and remote areas.

"Improving our contact tracing is another important step, and where COVIDSafe will be beneficial.

"We are really hopeful that with the combination of expanded testing and improved contact tracing, Australians will be able to return to a more normal lifestyle, confident that their safety continues to be the absolute priority."

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) joined health representative bodies at a detailed briefing on how the app works and how secure it is.

"There is no obligation to use the app, but it will a useful tool to be able to launch a quick response to potential outbreaks in remote areas," Dr Coltzau said.

"If you choose to use the app, make sure you have your Bluetooth on whenever you go out, to allow it to record a "digital handshake" with the people you spend 15 minutes or more in proximity to.

"People using COVIDSafe enter in their name (or pseudonym), date of birth (to assist in prioritisation of contact tracing) and post code.

"Should you then test positive to coronavirus, you will be contacted by a public health officer who, with your permission, will commence tracing your contacts over the past 21 days.

"Many issues around security have been addressed, giving us a level of confidence that there has been a significant increase in security when compared to the Singaporean version.

"COVIDSafe users are allocated a unique identifier which changes every two hours with data remaining encrypted at all times.

"We have been assured there will be no secondary use of the data, if you delete the app from your phone then all data is removed, and all contact data is deleted after 21 days when it is no longer clinically relevant.

"Most importantly, after the pandemic, all data will be deleted," Dr Coltzau said.

"So far Australia is one of the most successful countries in the world in our efforts to contain the virus, and we hope that the new measures being developed for this next phase will enable us to return to a more normal life, as quickly as possible."

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

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A high resolution photo of Dr Adam Coltzau is available here:
https://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/712

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:
Dr Adam Coltzau - Clinical Lead, COVID-19 Rural and Remote Response
Dr John Hall - RDAA President
Dr Ewen McPhee - ACRRM President

Media contacts (RDAA)
Patrick Daley on 0408 004 890
Ineke Kuiper on 0408 669 638

Media contacts (ACRRM)
Petrina Smith on 0414 820 847
ACRRM National Office on 1800 223 226