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Hon Martin Aldridge MLC
Shadow Emergency Services Minister

Aldridge obtains clarification on emergency service vaccination directions

Farmers and landowners responding to fires and emergencies on their properties will not be captured by the State Government's vaccination mandate for fire and emergency service volunteers.

Shadow Minister for Emergency Services, Hon Martin Aldridge, raised the point of concern directly with Chief Health Officer Dr Andy Robertson last week, following weeks of muddled messages from the State Government.

Mr Aldridge said he was pleased the Chief Health Officer had applied a "common-sense approach" to the directions.

"When an emergency unfolds in regional communities, private citizens are often the first to respond, helping contain fires on their own properties or helping their neighbours out until firefighting crews arrive," Mr Aldridge said.

"The *Fire and Emergency Services Worker Directions* did not make it clear whether unvaccinated private citizens would be permitted to respond or if doing so would put them in breach of the directions and facing hefty fines."

"The Chief Health Officer has confirmed that private citizens may continue to respond to emergency situations, regardless of vaccination status."

Mr Aldridge also raised concerns with the Chief Health Officer around paragraph 8 of the directions, which provide an exemption for unvaccinated fire and emergency service volunteers to respond if there is a shortage of fully vaccinated personnel.

"While the directions provide an exemption for unvaccinated volunteers to respond in certain circumstances, the Minister for Emergency Services has repeatedly told Parliament that no such exemption exists, causing greater confusion for volunteers," Mr Aldridge said.

"As such, I have asked the Chief Health Officer to provide practical guidance on how local governments and brigade captains might ensure they are adhering to the directions if they require the use of unvaccinated volunteers during a genuine emergency.

"The Chief Health Officer has agreed to this suggestion and has asked the Department of Fire and Emergency Services to consider providing this information in the form of further advice alongside the directions."

Mr Aldridge said he appreciated the opportunity to speak with the Chief Health Officer and better understand the mandatory vaccination directions.

"Given that fire and emergency service volunteers were specifically excluded from the vaccine mandate until very recently, it was important to understand the public health decision and obtain clarity around issues which volunteers and Local Governments were raising with my office."

Mr Aldridge said it was important for all West Australians to become vaccinated as soon as possible.

"Vaccination is key to protecting WA families and communities from the threat of COVID-19 and will help ensure our State re-opens safely in the coming months."

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