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PM SHOULD RETHINK LABOR'S SUGGESTION OF CASH FOR VAX

A good idea is a good idea. It doesn't matter where it came from.

It is hard to understand why Scott Morrison is refusing to consider Labor's good idea of paying Australians \$300 if they are vaccinated against Covid-19 by December.

Governments and businesses across the world are lifting vaccination rates by using incentives.

In the US, many states are offering cash payments.

In the UK, the government is working with business to offer young people incentives like discounts on taxis and takeaway food.

Back home, Telstra on Tuesday revealed it would give all vaccinated employees \$200 vouchers redeemable at major retailers.

Oxford University's Philip Clarke recently looked at incentives in the US and found states were offering everything from cash to hunting licences and entry to special lotteries to grab public interest.

Professor Clarke found cash incentives were the most likely to increase uptake.

But two weeks ago, when federal Labor proposed the \$300 cash incentive, Mr Morrison rejected the idea.

Instead of thinking the issue through, Mr Morrison launched a partisan political attack.

This was a weak response at a time when Australians are looking for solutions, not excuses or politics.

Australia's vaccination rate is one of the lowest in the developed world because Mr Morrison failed to order enough vaccines last year, putting our nation at the end of the supply queue. Mr Morrison has said vaccination is "not a race". It is a race. And Australia is well behind the field.

As of this week, just one in four Australians over 16 are fully vaccinated. Half of Americans are fully vaccinated, while in the UK the number stands at 60 per cent.

With millions of Australians in lockdown right now, we need a circuit breaker. Lockdowns are costing our national economy billions of dollars each week. We must be open to ideas that will help.

If Mr Morrison doesn't like the idea of incentives, he needs to come up with a better idea.

A year ago he promised vaccination would not be mandatory, but said he would come up with measures to "encourage" people to get the jab.

A year later, it is unclear what measures the Prime Minister was talking about. Indeed, there has been no effective advertising campaign to promote vaccination. Mr Morrison has a record of dismissing good ideas.

Last year, in the early stages of the pandemic, Labor suggested he subsidise Australians' wages until the crisis passed to ensure they retained their relationship with their employers throughout lockdowns.

Mr Morrison said our idea was "very dangerous".

But once he saw the queues of unemployed people forming around Centrelink offices, he announced JobKeeper wage subsidies. The only problem was that his system had a flaw that meant \$13bn of taxpayers' money was paid to profitable companies that did not need the assistance.

Mr Morrison also rejected Labor's suggestions to lift funding for mental health and telemedicine during the pandemic, only to reverse his position later and claim the ideas as his own. It was the same with paid pandemic leave.

It is time for a Morrison backflip on cash incentives for vaccination.

After all, as social services minister he created the "no job, no pay" policy that withheld family benefits and childcare subsidies from parents who refused to vaccinate their children against childhood diseases.

Incentives change human behaviour. The cost of Labor's \$300 vaccine plan is dwarfed by the financial cost of lockdowns to the Australian economy.

Australians would spend their vaccination incentive payments, which would stimulate economic activity and help struggling businesses get back on their feet. Getting vaccinated is not only about keeping Australians safe. It's about returning to normal and catching up to the rest of the world.

In London this week, the England cricket team played India at Lord's in front of full crowds. Bruce Springsteen is planning a series of concerts in New York this month. People who are fully vaccinated can enjoy the music without masks or social distancing.

But here in Australia, many people can't even go work. Children can't go to school. And parents are struggling with the pressure and stress that comes with trying to work from home while homeschooling their children.

After a year of Mr Morrison's bad decisions on vaccination, we must act to motivate Australians to get vaccinated as soon as possible.

There is no time for delay.

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