

Pat Dodson asks faith groups to stop â??evilâ?? anti-vax message

Western Australian Senator Pat Dodson has called on religious leaders to condemn Christian groups for spreading anti-vaccination messages in remote communities.

He says that some religious groups were fuelling vaccine hesitancy in the Kimberley, where vaccination rates are among the lowest in the country.

â??Iâ??ve called on the churches, church leaders, of all religious denominations, to come together and make some statement about it so that these sort of rogue groups can be isolated or at least identified, and the nature of their propaganda can be identified and disputed,â?• Dodson was quoted in *The Guardian* newspaper as saying.

Pat Dodson

â??Because itâ??s peopleâ??s lives at the end of the day thatâ??s going to be affected here, not some of these God-botherers.â?•

The Senator said it was difficult enough for people in remote communities to understand the fundamentals of distancing, of wearing masks, of separations in terms of gatherings and quarantining, without the anti-vaccination message.

â??Let alone someone that comes along and says that this particular virus is the work of the white man and the work of the devil. I mean thatâ??s thatâ??s just so preposterous. That ought to be offensive and people ought to be charged and put in jail over it.

â??Itâ??s destructive, itâ??s as evil as the evil that they purport to be defending people from and itâ??s wrong,â?• he was quoted as saying.

Aboriginal leaders and health experts are increasingly alarmed at the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous vaccination rates.

More than 750 Aboriginal people have contracted COVID since mid-June across NSW, predominantly in the west and far-west of the state.

Epidemiologist at the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council and Wakka Wakka and Wulli Wulli man Dr Peter Malouf told reporters that some communities were being left behind altogether in the rollout.

â??My frustration really is the fact that Aboriginal voices have never been heard through this current health response,â?• Dr Malouf said on Channel Nineâ??s *Weekend Today*.

Aboriginal health services elsewhere are closely monitoring the unfolding crisis in New South Wales.

â??This is a tragic wake-up call for us,â?• WAâ??s Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services medical director Lorraine Anderson told the ABC.

â??Weâ??re really concerned about it getting into our remote Aboriginal communities and very concerned about people getting sick and dying,â?• she said.

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