



Australia boosts PH war on Covid

By Rey Requejo

THE Australian government has committed to provide additional P480.2 million to help the Philippines procure COVID-19 vaccines.

Australian Ambassador to Manila Steven Robinson said Thursday that he has already informed Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr., Health Secretary Francisco Duque, National Task Force against COVID-19 chief implementer Carlito Galvez and his deputy Vince Dizon about the latest commitment from the Australian government.

Robinson said Manila will receive the additional procurement and end-to-end distribution support to meet its needs under Australia's new agreement with UNICEF to purchase safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines.

"I have informed Secretaries @ted-boylocisin @SecDuque Galvez and Dizon of Australia's additional com-

mitment of AUD13.72 (P480.2M) to buy #COVID19 vaccine for the Philippines," Robinson posted on his Twitter.

"This will make an important contribution to meeting the country's vaccine needs in 2021," the Australian envoy added.

Locsin thanked the Australian government for its additional assistance to the Philippines.

This new commitment, according to Robinson, is in addition to their support through the COVAX initiative to which Australia has contributed AU\$130 million.

To date, he noted, the Philippines received a total of 5,025,870 vaccine doses from the COVAX facility.

COVAX is the global pooled procure-

ment to help ensure fair and equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, especially to low-income countries like the Philippines.

Australia restricts AZ use

Australia recommended that AstraZeneca's COVID-19 jab should not be given to people under 60 on Thursday, a fresh blow to the country's glacial vaccine rollout.

Health Minister Greg Hunt said concerns over possible links to blood clots meant Pfizer was now "the preferred vaccine" for everyone under 60 years old.

Australian authorities had already restricted the AstraZeneca shot to those over 50 in April, after several cases of severe blood clots were possibly linked to it.

Thursday's further restriction came after a 52-year-old woman died of blood clotting after receiving the jab.

Hunt admitted the move would "challenge" the country's already badly stalled vaccine rollout, which has seen

just three percent of its population of 25 million fully inoculated so far.

Possible COVID treatment

A repurposed arthritis drug has shown positive results in a clinical trial of patients hospitalized with COVID-19, according to a paper published in the New England Journal of Medicine.

Tofacitinib, taken orally and sold under the brand name Xeljanz among others, was tested in a trial of 289 patients hospitalized with severe COVID across 15 locations in Brazil.

Half received the drug – a 10 mg pill twice a day – and standard care like glucocorticoids that tamp down an overactive immune response, while the other half received a placebo and standard care.

After 28 days, 18.1 percent of the group receiving the tofacitinib progressed to respiratory failure or death, compared to 29 percent in the placebo group. This represented a statistically significant relative risk reduction of 63 percent. **AFP**