

Push for vaccine passport

BY B.C LEWIS

A LOCAL MP and a business owner have joined forces to push for a vaccine passport pilot program in the Mountains to boost tourism for a community "on its knees" after fires, flood and COVID.

Blue Mountains MP Trish Doyle and Lorraine Allanson, owner of Mountain Whispers, a luxury boutique accommodation business, have urged residents to get vaccinated, so life can return to normal for those struggling to make ends meet.

Ms Doyle has written to Health Minister Brad Hazzard proposing the scheme - when the time is right - using the Mountains as the first region to let fully vaccinated visitors visit.

"The Mountains is on Sydney's doorstep, we are part of the Greater Sydney lockdown, and yet geographically separate from suburban Sydney and the Central West. This is the perfect place to run a scheme that reopens tourism in a COVID-safe way," she said.

Mandatory vaccination is not currently an option.



Blue Mountains MP Trish Doyle and Lorraine Allanson, owner of Mountain Whispers, want the Mountains to be the location for a vaccine pilot program.

More countries are introducing digital vaccination certificates to open up economies for those vaccinated. In the UK, a vaccine certificate for travel, called the NHS COVID Pass, was introduced in May.

Cricket Australia is looking into a Wimbledon-style vaccine passport system for this summer's Ashes.

The Mountains economy is tourism-dependent, with venues suffering significant-

ly from lockdowns, fires and floods. Bringing in the passport using the Service NSW app would give businesses certainty and act as an incentive for vaccinations, Ms Doyle said.

"Obviously this could only happen once vaccination rates reach an appropriate threshold and community transmission of the Delta-variant subsides, but this needs to be planned for now

so we are ready to hit the ground running," she added.

Ms Allanson said business owners and employers "need to see light at the end of the lockdown tunnel". The scheme would "send a clear signal to people to get vaccinated, but would also direct targeted economic stimulus to a region that has been on its knees for over 18 months".

During the recent lockdown, Ms Allanson had "lost in the vicinity of 54 per cent of business with an additional \$60,000 plus of potential business, as we were entering ... Yulefest and school holidays".

She has been "begging people to postpone and not cancel their booking" but expects further cancellations now the Leura Garden Festival will not go ahead.

Premier Gladys Berejiklian said talk of a passport was premature. She said incentives through a type of passport is "on the table and we understand what stress people are under and they want to be able to work [and] get children back to school ... all those other things will come in good time."