

Media Release

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VICTORIA'S HEALTH SYSTEM RISING TO THE PANDEMIC CHALLENGE

The latest hospital and ambulance performance data shows Victoria's health services have continued to provide high quality healthcare for those who need it most, despite being in the middle of a once-in-a-century pandemic.

As Victorians heeded the message to stay home to slow the spread of coronavirus – there has been substantial reductions in hospitalisations, emergency department visits and ambulance callouts in the three months to June.

Our health services across the state have also continued to provide timely care even while dealing with unprecedented widescale measures to keep Victorians safe like physical distancing, new PPE and infection control procedures and juggling workforce demands.

Emergency department visits fell by 25 per cent between April and June compared to the same time last year with 357,449 people presenting for treatment. Treatment times improved with the average wait time just 12 minutes and 80.15 per cent of all ED patients seen within the benchmark times, up more than 10 per cent on the previous quarter.

As there were fewer emergency department presentations and a reduction in elective surgery, there was a corresponding decrease in hospitalisations – with 408,837 Victorians staying overnight in hospital – down by 84,435 on a year earlier.

Coronavirus has also kept our paramedics busy over the past three months. Despite time consuming additional decontamination and PPE requirements, crews responded to more than 17,300 potential coronavirus cases – an average of 191 per day.

There were 66,906 ambulance callouts for the quarter, a decrease of 11 per cent compared to the previous year.

In the face of these additional coronavirus challenges the average response time of 11 minutes and 47 seconds remained under the 15-minute benchmark – supported by the Government's fast-tracking of 120 extra paramedic recruits for the expected increase in demand.

Coordination between Ambulance Victoria and our hospitals has also improved, with data showing 86.54 per cent of patients were transferred from the ambulance to the hospital ED within the benchmark 40 minutes – up by 5.48 per cent on the same time last year.

To ensure our hospitals had the capacity to manage additional demand from coronavirus, National Cabinet made the decision to postpone all non-urgent elective surgery across the country throughout this reporting period, which has seen the number of patients waiting for elective surgery increase.

The Victorian Government will recommence an elective surgery blitz as soon as it is safe to do so – however with non-urgent elective surgery being postponed again this week to create capacity for aged care transfers we do expect the waiting list will continue to grow in the short-term.

Overall, patients that received surgery during the last quarter received it quicker, with the average time to treat sitting at 20.5 days which is 7.5 days less than the same time last year and 12.5 days less than the previous quarter. This is also considerably better than the 2018-19 national average of 41 days.

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This latest data shows that our doctors, nurses, paramedics and everyone else who help keep hospitals running, have done an outstanding job caring for those who need it – despite all the challenges this pandemic has thrown at them.

The coronavirus pandemic has also led to innovations and improvements which will have long-term benefits for our health system, such as workforce upskilling, greater bed flexibility, more telehealth appointments and hospital in the home, and greater coordination between all levels of our health services and partner agencies.

With the ongoing high number of cases over the past month leading to more Victorians in hospital with coronavirus, and a further postponement of non-urgent elective surgery in July, Victoria's next quarterly data will likely reflect the ongoing challenges our health system faces as we move through the pandemic.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Jenny Mikakos

“The coronavirus pandemic represents the biggest challenge our health system has ever seen, and I couldn't be prouder of the way all our dedicated healthcare workers have risen to the occasion.”

“Our health system has proven to be well-prepared, adaptable and resilient and all Victorians can be reassured that whether they're presenting with coronavirus or not, our health services are ready to provide care to those who need it, when they need it.”

“We know this will be an anxious time for those waiting for a procedure, but our focus right now has to be on responding to the pandemic. These sacrifices are vital to keeping our state safe and preventing our health system from being overwhelmed.”