

Media Release

The Hon Martin Foley MP
Minister for Health
Minister for Ambulance Services
Minister for Equality



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MORE AMBULANCES, MORE PARAMEDICS AND MORE BEDS

As we continue to recover from the global coronavirus pandemic, the Andrews Labor Government is putting more paramedics and ambulances on the road and ensuring health services are equipped to meet the unprecedented levels of demand we're seeing across the country.

The *Victorian Budget 2021/22* will deliver more than \$759 million in funding for more paramedics, more triage care and support staff for Ambulance Victoria, as well as targeted funding to improve flow in our busy emergency departments. The investment will also support the opening of new beds in health services across the state, supported by Victoria's hardworking healthcare workforce.

Despite Victoria being free of community transmission, the global coronavirus pandemic has had a lasting impact on our entire health system – as is reflected in states and territories across Australia.

Last year, while the necessary restrictions were in place to save lives, many people deferred their normal check-ups and care routines, which means there is now a large number of Victorians presenting to our hospitals with more complex or critical conditions.

People with coronavirus symptoms may also not be able to attend their GPs, as many require a negative test in order to make an appointment. For some, particularly worried families with unwell children, this means they are then presenting straight to our emergency departments. This is becoming more of a concern, particularly as flu season begins.

The coronavirus pandemic also changed the way Victorians access routine care – last quarter alone, there were more than 36,000 callers to 000 who did not need an emergency ambulance and were instead connected to more appropriate primary care services.

Between July-September 2020 and January-March 2021, the volume of emergency department presentations increased by 30 per cent, putting additional strain on all parts of our health system and our healthcare workforce.

Workforce fatigue from the global pandemic, cases being more complex and critical, staff having to don PPE and take extra COVIDSafe precautions with patients, and more people presenting to emergency departments also means Victoria's usual health performance measures have been impacted and may take some time to recover.

To speed up this recovery and address changing demand, the Labor Government will invest an extra \$266 million in Ambulance Victoria to support them with things like additional triage nurses, an expansion to secondary triage services and non-emergency patient transfers.

It will also help deliver new paramedics and additional support staff to help their hardworking colleagues – and reach Victorians when they're needed most.

Another \$204.3 million investment will bolster Ambulance Victoria's resources through programs like Telehealth, and will deliver ongoing operational improvements across the state.

This will build on the more than 250 paramedics already recruited by Ambulance Victoria since November 2020 and the more than \$1 billion in funding for Ambulance Victoria since Labor came to Government.

Media contact: Hannah Jenkins 0403 177 892 | hannah.jenkins@minstaff.vic.gov.au

The support also builds on the work we're doing to ensure our healthcare workers who worked tirelessly to protect Victorians throughout the pandemic, have access to the mental health and wellbeing services they need with our \$9.8 million Worker Wellbeing Centre, delivered through last year's Budget.

With our Ambulances Services and hospitals so interlinked, it's important additional demand and patient care complexities are addressed as a whole.

The Labor Government will invest a further \$89 million to boost capacity and drive improvements and support flow through our busy emergency departments.

Another \$200 million will commission the opening of hospital facilities – including supporting the operation of previously announced beds as they open and any additional staffing required – whether they be our hardworking nurses, allied health professionals or doctors.

The Government will also continue working closely with experts from our health services, ambulances services, workforce representatives and primary health services to determine where the need is most and how we can best address it, to ensure Victorians get the care they need.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health and Ambulance Services Martin Foley

"The pandemic has had a lasting impact, and states are seeing more ED presentations, more ambulance callouts – and less people seeing their GPs. With more paramedics, more beds and new types of triage, we'll help Victoria recover faster and ensure our community continues to have access to the world-class care they deserve."

"Our paramedics are some of the hardest working in the country and this investment reinforces that we will always back them – and the extraordinary work they do."

"Our hospitals and emergency departments rely on the diligent work of our healthcare workforce, from our nurses and doctors, to our allied health professionals and our patient service attendants – and we thank them every day."