

Media Release

The Hon Martin Foley MP
Minister for Health
Minister for Ambulance Services
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HELPING OUR HEALTH SYSTEM HOLD THE LINE AGAINST COVID

Victoria's health system will be boosted further with a range of measures to free up capacity in public hospitals, as we head toward an expected surge in COVID patients.

The new \$307 million package is designed to make the most of our resources within hospitals, while increasing in home and community care options to keep our critical care beds ready for those who need them most.

Hospital in the Home will receive an urgent injection of up to \$87 million to care for both COVID and non-COVID patients at home, which will free up more than 100 public hospital beds in metropolitan Melbourne.

An injection of \$42 million will allow the *COVID Positive Pathways* program to employ more than 150 extra staff to assess what medical or social supports COVID positive patients might need to help them remain at home during their recovery, and additional staff to navigate their COVID care from hospital back into their home.

The funding will also provide oximeters and home oxygen units to positive patients, so their symptoms can be monitored remotely, and help to establish dedicated triage spaces in the program for people who deteriorate and require hospitalisation.

Ambulance Victoria will receive more than \$40 million to boost their capacity to manage increased COVID caseload and provide surge capacity for patients with less serious conditions that still require hospitalisation.

The funding will provide 58 non-emergency patient transport vehicles, more than 200 student paramedics, 13 additional Peak Period Units, and additional paramedics to provide care at handover and assist with flow at Emergency Departments.

Aboriginal health organisations in regional and metropolitan areas will share in \$12 million to increase clinical sessions, in-home care, healthcare coordination between Aboriginal and mainstream services, and provide increased COVID care pathways and primary healthcare to reduce pressure on the hospital system.

Additional funding will support patients with a disability who are currently in a metropolitan hospital and are medically fit for discharge, but are waiting in hospital for NDIS packages and accommodation.

Victoria will step up while waiting for national NDIS processes to be worked through, with flexible support packages that enable these patients to move home or into comfortable and appropriate community accommodation – freeing up hospital beds for COVID-positive patients.

Similarly, geriatric clinicians will be deployed to residential aged care facilities to reduce avoidable hospital admissions. Combined with high vaccination rates, this will see more elderly residents cared for where they live, rather than in hospital.

An extra 450 people will be supported by Melbourne based specialist community palliative care providers in their homes – which is expected to free up between 10 and 20 per cent of the metropolitan palliative care beds over the next five months.

Extra workforce measures include \$3.6 million to support 3,000 critical care training places and employ 24 health educators on wards to provide additional training for 750 multi-disciplinary clinicians in ICU surge and acute care.

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A COVID Clinical Reserves Units will be established through \$2.6 million to support the rapid deployment of skilled staff – from a pool of about 140 staff – to regional health services that may be impacted by furloughing and high levels of community transmission.

These measures come as Victoria's latest health performance data is released – showing that Victoria's health system continues to provide good outcomes for patients despite being under significant pressure in the face of ongoing COVID challenges.

The 2021-22 Q1 health service and ambulance performance data shows hospitals admitted 500,735 patients over June to September 2021 – up by 7,112 on the previous quarter and by a massive 71,949 on a year earlier.

Our busy emergency departments saw 445,373 patients in the three months, up by 83,042 on a year earlier. These figures show the importance of strategies and programs to keep people healthy in the community and out of our hospitals – including vaccination against COVID-19.

Patients occupied 1.389 million bed-days in hospitals, up by more than 164,000 on a year ago – with COVID patients in particular staying in hospital longer than normal.

All of the most urgent Category 1 elective surgery patients were seen within the benchmark 30 days – half of them within 12 days. During the quarter hospitals and health services provided surgery and treatment to 47,509 patients from the waiting list.

Victoria's elective surgery waiting list at September 30 was 67,596 – with that number expected to increase next quarter as a result of the current restrictions on non-urgent elective surgery. Addressing elective surgery backlogs will again be a key priority for our hospitals once it is safe to do so.

Ambulances attended 80,459 Code 1 urgent calls in the three months – 11,792 more than a year earlier – and were on scene within the benchmark 15 minutes in 73.5 per cent of cases. The average response time state-wide was 13 minutes and 39 seconds.

The number of patients transferred from ambulances to hospital care within the benchmark 40 minutes improved slightly on the previous quarter to 67.1 per cent, but COVID-19 patients are prioritised under a new protocol.

Ambulance Victoria is working with all metropolitan and regional hospitals to implement the immediate transfer of COVID-19 patients and suspected cases to hospital emergency departments. This helps paramedics get back on the road sooner and manage demand over the coming months.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Martin Foley

“Victorians have earned their freedoms, but for our hospital staff and ambos the worst is yet to come – that's why we've prepared early to create as much capacity in the health system as possible.”

“This new funding will make the most of our hospital resources and boost community care options so that we can manage extra demand as case numbers rise.”

“The latest health performance data shows how much pressure COVID has put on our health system – and I could not be prouder of our healthcare workers for rising to the challenge and continuing to care for Victorians.”