

Media Release

The Hon James Merlino MP
Acting Premier
Minister for Education
Minister for Mental Health



Sunday, 3 April 2022

COVID CATCH-UP PLAN TO DELIVER FOR PATIENTS

A record number of Victorians will receive elective surgery as part of the Andrews Labor Government's COVID Catch-Up Plan – designed to exceed pre-pandemic levels by 25 per cent and get more Victorians the care they need, when they need it.

We know COVID-19 has disrupted care for many Victorians, while nurses and doctors focused on patients in the most critical conditions.

As part of the plan, a \$1.5 billion investment will boost surgical activity across Victoria to record levels, providing the care which was deferred because of the global pandemic.

Designed with our hardworking healthcare workers front of mind, the plan will mean we're training more nurses, and opening more theatres for longer – including nights and weekends.

Next year, we'll be running at 125 per cent of our normal pre-pandemic effort – despite the Commonwealth refusing to step up and fund half of the state's hospital costs. It will mean 40,000 extra surgeries in the next year, building up to record 240,000 surgeries every year in 2024.

In a Victorian first, Frankston Private Hospital will be transformed into a public surgery centre with the capacity to support up to 9,000 public patients per year once fully operational in 2023.

With no emergency department diverting healthcare workers to more critical patients, this facility will be focussed on COVID catch-up care – meaning patients can get the treatment they need faster.

Two additional state-of-the-art theatres will be completed by early next year to boost services at the hospital and provide more options for Victorians waiting for their surgery.

A \$475 million investment will support more activity in the public system, including more same-day surgeries, increased twilight and after-hours work, and theatre improvements to increase efficiency and fast-track patients through the system.

More public patients will be treated in private hospitals with a \$548 million investment – building upon sector collaboration we've seen during the pandemic – with an extra 51,300 Victorians to receive non-urgent surgery by June 2024.

Rapid Access Hubs – which exclusively perform specific surgeries such as hernia repairs, cataract surgeries and joint replacements – will be established across metropolitan public hospitals allowing surgical theatres, equipment and staffing to be streamlined. This will increase the number of surgeries that can be performed each day.

The first eight hubs will be established in the next year at St Vincent's on the Park, Broadmeadows Hospital, Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital, Royal Women's Hospital, Werribee Mercy Hospital, Sandringham Hospital, the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, and one in regional Victoria with details to be confirmed shortly.

To support the delivery of this new plan and drive long-term improvements and system reforms, a new Chief Surgical Adviser will work with a Surgery Recovery Taskforce to provide clinical expertise and advice.

Victoria's healthcare workforce will be supported by a package worth more than \$80 million to upskill more than 1,000 nurses and theatre and sterilisation technicians, support the training of an additional 400 perioperative nurses and recruit a further 2,000 highly skilled healthcare workers from overseas.

A \$20 million Surgical Equipment Innovation Fund will be established to ensure our health services can upgrade their surgical equipment and diagnostic machines with the latest technology which will help get more patients on surgical lists every day.

Quotes attributable to Acting Premier James Merlino

"The pandemic has been really tough on everyone, but nothing matters more than the health of our loved ones. We've got a plan to make sure every Victorian family gets the care they deserve."

"This plan will see record numbers of Victorians get the surgeries they need, while making sure our frontline workforce is supported."

"The Prime Minister said he would pay half the costs for Covid-related care in our hospitals, so our nurses and doctors had what they needed to look after people during the pandemic. Now, he's cutting \$1.5 billion out of our health system when patients need it most."

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Martin Foley

"We've seen Covid disrupt care and cancel surgeries for people right across the country, while our hardworking nurses and doctors have put everything into caring for the most critical patients."

"We're making sure more Victorians get the care they need with a game-changing investment, while the Prime Minister once again fails to show up for Victorians and refuses to go 50/50 on health costs."