

Media Release

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP
Premier



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SUPPORTING OUR HEALTHCARE WORKERS TO DELIVER CARE

The Victorian Government is delivering another unprecedented investment into Victoria's health system, making sure patients are getting the quality care they need during periods of record demand and increasing COVID and flu hospitalisations, and giving our healthcare workers the helping hand they need.

As a challenging flu season and the emergence of the Omicron BA.5 variant causes a rise in hospitalisations and unwell healthcare workers across Australia, the Victorian Government is delivering more support to make sure patients are getting the emergency healthcare they need sooner, as part of our ongoing plan to give nurses, doctors and hospital staff everything they need to care for patients.

This innovative package will deliver system-wide improvements for our hospitals to respond to the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, making patients time in hospital more efficient while the health system deals with staff shortages.

Additional specialist staff will be deployed across an initial 12 major hospitals, including;

- Offload nurses to help ambulances offload patients quicker, allowing ambulances to return to the road sooner to attend to other calls
- Triage doctors responsible for assessing patients quickly and establishing the level of care that they require
- Discharge coordinators to focus on the timely transition of care from the ward to home or another healthcare facility.

These staff will work together to help offload, assess and treat patients faster and help progress patients more efficiently through their care journey – be it emergency surgery, admission to a ward or being discharged home.

This model is based on the model exhibited in Leeds, United Kingdom – making patients' time in hospital more efficient while we deal with major staffing shortages, to ensure patients are seen quicker, and ambulances are back on the road faster.

Initially these roles will be allocated to dedicated patient flow resources at:

- Alfred Hospital
- Austin Hospital
- University Hospital Geelong
- Box Hill Hospital
- Grampians Health - Ballarat Hospital
- Casey Hospital
- Dandenong Hospital
- Monash Medical Centre
- Northern Hospital Epping
- Frankston Hospital
- Royal Melbourne Hospital and
- Sunshine Hospital

A partnership has also been established with the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, public health services and Ambulance Victoria to deliver improvements on patient flow in emergency departments and ambulance transfers at hospitals so patients receive timely emergency care – despite the pressures facing hospitals across Australia.

In addition, a new trial will be undertaken between Ambulance Victoria as well as select public and private hospitals which will see private hospital emergency departments and acute bed capacity support all patients – building on existing public and private arrangements throughout the pandemic.

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To reduce demand on the hospital system, two paediatric GP respiratory clinics will be established to combat the recent surge in cases of COVID-19 and flu, preventing avoidable visits to the emergency department for children experiencing respiratory illness.

This GP-led service will run out of the Royal Children's Hospital and Monash Children's Hospital and allow children with low to moderate symptoms to receive free and immediate treatment for a range of respiratory conditions such as the flu, COVID-19, asthma and hay fever.

These two new clinics will add to the 53 state and Commonwealth run GP respiratory clinics already being progressively established across the state, including 36 in metropolitan Melbourne and 17 in regional Victoria.

This package comes as the State Controller, Health declares that Victoria will move into Stage Three of the Health System Winter Response, unlocking additional levers to manage the pressure on the health system, including the use of private hospital capacity to support public patients and converting more hospitals to Tier One streaming services – giving Ambulance Victoria more local options to transport COVID positive patients.

Since 22 June there has been a 99 per cent increase in Victorians in hospital with COVID-19, a 60 per cent increase in ICU admissions due to COVID-19 and a 47 per cent increase in workforce furlough. In the first week of July alone, there was a cumulative absence of more than 10,000 staff across the system.

This funding boost comes in addition to the Victorian Government's \$12 billion comprehensive health plan which is delivering more paramedics on the road, more Triple Zero call takers, expanded emergency departments, and the recruiting or training of 7,000 extra healthcare workers to reinforce our health system.

Since 2014 we have added more than 22,000 extra healthcare workers to public health service, a near 30% increase to the workforce.

Over the pandemic period alone – despite enormous pressure on the system, intense competition from other states and other countries and the international border being closed for almost two years – we have grown the health workforce by well over 8,500 workers.

Every Victorian can play their part in supporting our health system this winter by staying up to date with vaccinations, wearing a face mask, maintaining good ventilation indoors, getting tested if feeling unwell and discussing antiviral treatment options with their GP if they know they're at risk.

Quotes attributable to Premier Daniel Andrews

"Healthcare systems around the world are under pressure as we battle new variants alongside other respiratory illnesses – these investments are part of our plan to support our healthcare workers and get Victorians the care they need."

"Giving our nurses and doctors an extra pair of hands and making improvements that help patients flow through our emergency departments faster will ensure Victorians get the care they need faster as Australia faces a difficult winter."

Quote attributable to Minister for Health and Ambulance Services Mary-Anne Thomas

"All our healthcare workers are doing an incredible job under challenging circumstances – and this package is about giving them the support they need, to give Victorians the care they deserve faster."