

Monday, 18 July 2022

BACKING PARAMEDICS TO GET PATIENTS THE CARE THEY NEED SOONER

The Victorian Government is delivering another boost into Victoria's health system, as part of a comprehensive plan to make sure patients are getting the quality care they need while there is record demand on the national health system.

As a challenging flu season and the emergence of the Omicron BA.5 variant causes a rise in hospitalisations across Australia, the Government is delivering more support for our healthcare workers, as part of an ongoing plan to reinforce health services through winter and beyond.

Further initiatives of the most recent \$162 million package will deliver improvements to Ambulance Victoria's operations, making sure patients are taken to hospital quickly, and freeing up our paramedics to get back on the road faster. They include:

- Doubling the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department capacity - allowing up to 500 patients per day to access a video consultation with an emergency doctor or nurse from their own home. This includes paramedics connecting suitable patients to the program on scene for virtual assessment, management and referral
- Expanding eligibility criteria for the Virtual Emergency Department so that people living in residential aged care facilities and everyone on the COVID Positive Pathways program can use the program – including supporting access to critical antiviral treatments
- A new rostering pattern for advanced life support paramedic crews will be trialled across four ambulance service areas in metropolitan Melbourne, delivering more flexible shift arrangements and optimise fleet availability
- Expanding Ambulance Victoria Offload teams to a total of 14 major public hospitals, including six existing sites, to enable timely patient offload and support ambulance availability
- A new, near real-time data dashboard to give paramedics and healthcare workers a better overview of system capacity to assist them make local decisions that help balance demand across the system.

Healthcare workers are not immune to winter illnesses themselves – with 2,000 staff furloughed across the system each day. To help with high-demand workforce planning, Ambulance Victoria's pandemic response arrangements will continue over the winter period – delivering extra trained ambulance staff at emergency departments to help with patient offload and care, freeing up paramedics.

Since its establishment in October 2020, the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department has supported more than 28,000 patients and achieved an average ambulance and or emergency department diversion rate of approximately 71 per cent for all patients seen.

This funding boost comes in addition to the Government's \$12 billion comprehensive plan for the health system 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, the Government has added more than 22,000 extra healthcare workers to the public health service – 8,500 additional staff joined the workforce during the pandemic alone.

Every Victorian can play their part in supporting our health system this winter by staying up to date with vaccinations, wearing a quality 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 – this package forms part of our plan to support our healthcare workers and get Victorians the care they deserve."

"We'll have more paramedics working alongside our nurses and doctors to get more support to Victorians who can be treated in their home – plus the tools to get patients to get the best care in the right place if they need to go to hospital."

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

"Our paramedics are doing an incredible job under challenging circumstances – and this package will help ambulances and hospitals work more closely together to get people the care they need, as soon as they need it."