

Media Release

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP
Premier



Tuesday, 10 January 2023

VIRTUAL ED TREATS RECORD NUMBER OF VICTORIANS

Victoria's Virtual ED (VVED) helped thousands of people avoid a trip to a busy emergency department following record demand over the Christmas and New Year period.

Premier Daniel Andrews and Acting Minister for Health Colin Brooks today visited the VVED to thank the doctors and nurses who have supported more than 85,000 Victorians since the Andrews Labor Government launched and expanded the service.

First established as a pilot in October 2020, the service allows non-urgent patients to be virtually assessed by emergency doctors and nurses from their home or workplace – while paramedics can also link patients up for assessment on whether a trip to hospital is needed.

The VVED provides clinical assessments, medical advice, treatment and local referrals to other health services if required, freeing up resources like emergency departments and ambulances for those who need them most.

While the VVED treats an average of 300 to 350 Victorians every day, over the holiday period this skyrocketed – with more than 640 patients seen on Boxing Day alone.

Ambulance Victoria also saw record demand over the festive period – with New Year's Day being AV's busiest day on record, responding to more than 2,300 emergency incidents including 1,327 Code 1 callouts.

As a virtual service, the VVED offers a flexible work model – allowing it to respond to high demand as doctors and nurses log on for shifts from right around the state.

While the service was able to deliver expert care to all Victorians who needed it, feedback from doctors and nurses shows a significant number of patients accessed the VVED over this period because they couldn't get into a local GP with reduced holiday hours – or, with bulk-billing doctors now few and far between, the cost was too high.

Given this lack of access, there is no more urgent priority for National Cabinet than reforming primary care – and the Labor Government will continue to advocate to the Commonwealth on behalf of Victorians.

Funded as part of the Labor Government's \$1.4 billion package to support our doctors, nurses and paramedics, the VVED is just one initiative helping to ease demand on our EDs and paramedics.

While we continue to advocate for the Commonwealth to profoundly reform primary care, we know Victorians need urgent care now – that's why we're delivering 25 Priority Primary Care Centres, have opened 30 state-run GP respiratory clinics and expanded the Better at Home program – keeping people at home while they get expert care.

Quotes attributable to Premier Daniel Andrews

"Our primary care system is broken, and National Cabinet must make reforming the system its priority for 2023, otherwise great services like the Victorian Virtual ED won't be able to see the people who need them most."

"While it reduces pressure on physical EDs, the Virtual ED was never meant to be a substitute for getting care from your local GP – it's critical we make primary care cheaper and more accessible as a first port of call."

Quote attributable to Acting Minister for Health Colin Brooks

"Despite record demand, the doctors and nurses at the virtual ED did an incredible job ensuring Victorians got the care they needed over the holiday period."

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