

Media Release

The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP

Leader of the House

Minister for Health

Minister for Health Infrastructure

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INTERNATIONAL HEALTH WORKERS PAVING THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

Victorians are receiving the care they need, with a key initiative of the Andrews Labor Government's \$12 billion *Pandemic Repair Plan* now delivered in full.

Since launching the plan last year, more than 2,000 highly skilled doctors, nurses, and midwives from overseas have joined the state's hospital and healthcare services.

This global pipeline of workers ensures Victoria's healthcare system can continue to respond to the unprecedented demand and complex challenges resulting from the once-in-100-year COVID-19 pandemic.

Incentivised by Victoria's global reputation as a leader in healthcare and extensive training and development opportunities, international workers now account for more than one-third of the 6,200 healthcare employees recruited and trained as part of Victoria's record workforce investment.

Moving from countries like the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Ireland, Hong Kong, and Sri Lanka, more than one in four are living in regional Victoria, many of them with families – boosting the state's economy and driving growth to the regions.

In total, 517 international recruits have taken up a role in regional Victoria, while 1,499 started a position in a metropolitan healthcare service.

Of these workers, 44 per cent have medical roles in areas like general medicine, emergency medicine, psychiatry, surgery, anaesthesia, intensive care, and paediatrics.

51 per cent of recruits are nurses including midwives, theatre nurses, emergency nurses and mental health nurses, while 4 per cent are allied health workers like physiotherapists, occupational therapists and biomedical scientists.

They join the 26,500 extra healthcare workers recruited to the state's public health system since 2014, including 8,500 who joined the workforce during the pandemic.

While high demand on the health system continues, initiatives under the Labor Government's *Pandemic Repair Plan* are making a real impact on the timely delivery of care for Victorians when they need it most.

The massive expansion of the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department (VVED) and the establishment of 27 Priority Primary Care Centres (PPCCs) across the state is having a positive effect on busy hospital emergency departments.

Median emergency department wait times have improved each quarter over the last year, back down to pre-pandemic levels of just 17 minutes, despite the 2022/23 financial year being the busiest year on record.

Since launching the \$1.5 billion *COVID Catch-Up Plan* last year, the planned surgery wait list has decreased by almost 20 per cent thanks to investments such as the \$20 million Surgical Equipment Innovation Fund, the new Frankston and Blackburn public surgery centres, and our new Rapid Access Hubs.

The latest performance data, released today, shows Victoria is well on the road to recovery, with planned surgery delivered to 50,678 patients in the last quarter alone.

The waitlist is now down to 72,024, with Patient Support Units established at 23 health services across the state to assist patients waiting for treatment.

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99.98 per cent of Category One (urgent) planned surgery patients continue to be treated within recommended timeframes, while the median wait times drastically improved by 40 days for Category Two (semi-urgent) patients and 60 days for Category Three (non-urgent) patients compared to this time last year.

Ambulance Victoria services continue to experience high demand, with the 2022/23 financial year the busiest year on record – 400,000 Victorians received a lights and sirens response, totalling more than 1,000 responses per day.

The last quarter was the third busiest on record, with Code One cases increasing by almost a third compared to only five years ago.

With the cooler months traditionally leading to higher demand on resources due to an increase in respiratory illnesses, it is a trend reflected in the most recent quarter's data with 61.7 per cent of the 97,509 Code One cases responded to within 15 minutes.

To help with this demand, the Labor Government is getting more ambulances and paramedics on the road, supplying further training, enlisting more Triple Zero call takers, increasing the capacity of the Secondary Triage service, and expanding the VVED to help avoid unnecessary trips to hospitals.

All Victorians are encouraged to help paramedics and other frontline healthcare workers by saving emergency department visits and Triple Zero calls for emergencies only, by accessing services such as the VVED, the PPCCs, the 24/7 Supercare Pharmacies and NURSE-ON-CALL in non-emergencies.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas

"We said we would recruit 2,000 healthcare workers from overseas so our hardworking doctors and nurses can continue to deliver the highest quality care, and that is exactly what we have done."

"Victoria has a world-class health system, and we are thrilled that thousands of highly skilled healthcare workers have chosen to move overseas and call our state home, joining us in providing the best care for Victorians."

Quotes attributable to Minister for Ambulance Services Gabrielle Williams

"Our paramedics are the very best of us, providing emergency care to Victorians in often life-threatening situations – that is why we continue to invest in the resources they need to respond when and where they are needed."

"We know people get sick when it's colder, and that means our paramedics are busier – which is why we're recruiting more of them, delivering new stations and investing in services that give Victorians alternative care pathways."