

Media Release

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Elective surgery recovery remains the focus as BHI report released

Hunter New England Local Health District's (HNELHD) performance remained strong in the latest Healthcare Quarterly report released today by the Bureau of Health Information (BHI).

District Chief Executive Michael DiRienzo said he was pleased with the results and knows how hard staff have worked during the July to September quarter to get the District back to where it was prior to the height of COVID-19.

'This quarter came after the first wave of the pandemic, at a time where we were working hard to recommence elective surgery and transition safely back to a new normal,' Mr DiRienzo said.

'Overall, the results are as expected, with a fall in emergency presentations and visits to our hospitals and a rise in people waiting for surgery as National Cabinet paused non-urgent surgery to respond to the pandemic.'

'Our focus remains on ensuring that patients who had their surgery postponed due to COVID-19, receive their surgery as soon as possible and we are working with our private hospital partners to further boost our elective surgery capacity.'

Overall, emergency department attendances across the District decreased significantly by 6.7 per cent or 7434 fewer attendances to 102,711 for the quarter.

The number of patients starting treatment on time increased to 76.5 per cent an increase of 3.2 percentage points.

There were 21,019 emergency department attendances at John Hunter Hospital during the July - September 2020 quarter, 1049 fewer presentations than in 2019. The number of patients starting treatment on time increased by 6.5 percentage points to 77.7 per cent from 71.2 per cent in 2019.

The hospital also improved its Transfer of Care result, with 92.6 per cent of 6235 patients transferred from ambulances to the emergency department within 30 minutes.

Tamworth Hospital's emergency department attendances decreased by 16.5 per cent, or 2007 fewer presentations, to 10,173 for the quarter. The number of patients starting treatment on time improved to 69.9 per cent, an increase of 7.5 percentage points compared to this quarter in 2019.

Hospitals across the District experienced similar large drops in ED attendances including Maitland Hospital with 7.4 percent or 975 fewer patients, Manning Hospital with a decrease of 7.9 per cent or 672 fewer patients, Armidale Hospital with a decrease of 11 per cent or 498 fewer patients, Inverell Hospital with a decrease of 21.8 per cent or 537 fewer patients, and Moree Hospital with a decrease of 13.5 per cent or 351 fewer patients.

However, the District's rural and regional hospitals have worked hard this quarter to improve ED wait times and time to treatment.

At Armidale Hospital, 71 per cent of patients started treatment on time – an increase of 15.6 percentage points compared to this quarter in 2019. Achieving 79.2 per cent of patients leaving the ED within four hours, which bettered the state average.

Similarly, at Gunnedah Hospital 83.4 per cent of patients started treatment on time and at Inverell Hospital, 87.1 per cent of patients started treatment on time. Both hospitals also beat the state average of 71.5 per cent for leaving the ED in under four hours with 90.3 per cent and 86.9 per cent respectively.

'Faced with a drop in the number of ED attendances during this ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, our rural and regional hospitals have taken this opportunity to improve ED wait times and ensure our patients are being seen as soon as possible,' Mr DiRienzo said.

Elective surgery

National Cabinet's decision to pause non-urgent surgeries has impacted the number of patients who were on the District's waiting list and ready for their elective surgery or procedure.

Hospitals across the District worked hard to ensure almost every one of all 1,834 urgent elective surgeries were performed on time.

'Of the District's 15 hospitals captured in the report, five hospitals ranked perfectly for performing elective surgeries on time, which is fantastic to see,' Mr DiRienzo said.

The best performing hospitals include Gunnedah, Moree, Muswellbrook, Narrabri and Singleton, where 100 percent of surgeries across all urgency categories were performed on time. This performance exceeds the state average and waiting times for all elective surgeries are well within the recommended timeframes.

'As expected, patients who had waited longer for surgery due to the suspension began to receive their surgery in July to September 2020. This contributed to a decrease in the percentage of procedures performed within recommended time frames and an increase in waiting times, particularly at our larger hospitals.'

'We are committed to providing the best possible care to our community and will continue to work on improvements and getting back to capacity to ensure all patients receive the care they need.'

In the 2020-21 budget, the NSW Government has invested an extra \$458.5 million to fast-track elective surgeries which were delayed as a result of the Federal Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring patients will be booked in to public or private hospitals as soon as possible.

Since March 2020, the NSW Government has committed more than \$3.0 billion to help transform the healthcare system to increase its capacity and ensure it is well placed to manage the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 and respond to any future crises. This funding has helped bring the 2020-21 Health budget to \$29.3 billion.