

EMBARGOED – 12.01am, 16 March 2022

Hunter New England Health continues to deliver high quality care despite COVID-19 challenges

The October to December 2021 quarter captures the later stages of the Delta outbreak and the emerging Omicron variant. This had a considerable impact on healthcare services across Hunter New England Local Health District (HNELHD), its staff, patients and community.

The District's Chief Executive, Michael DiRienzo said the latest Bureau of Health Information (BHI) Healthcare Quarterly report is testament to the hard work of the District's healthcare workers.

“While activity levels were down overall, we saw a significant increase in the number of emergency department patients requiring the highest levels of care,” Mr DiRienzo said.

“This report highlights a time of rising COVID-19 case numbers both within the community and in our hospitals during this reporting period, and our staff continued to rise to the challenge during these difficult circumstances.”

In total, 113,400 patients attended emergency departments (EDs) across HNELHD in the October to December quarter, down 2.2 per cent or 2,504 fewer attendances compared to the same period in 2020.

The number of triage category 1 (resuscitation) patients, the most urgent patients, increased by 24 presentations – or 5.9 per cent – compared with the same quarter in 2020 while triage category 2 (emergency) cases increased by 1,623 presentations – or 13.2 per cent. These numbers are the highest of any final quarter in HNELHD since BHI reporting began in 2010.

Despite this added pressure, 71.7 per cent of triage category 2 patients started treatment on time, which is better than the NSW average of 60.3 per cent.

The District performed 7,121 elective surgeries in the October to December 2021 quarter. This is a reduction of 12.5 per cent, or 1,016 fewer procedures, compared with the same period in 2020.

However, almost all urgent elective surgeries (99.9 per cent) were performed on time.

All hospitals across the District also performed very well individually on surgeries, performing better than similarly sized hospitals throughout NSW.

The 2021-22 NSW Health total budget is \$30.2 billion, including an \$80 million investment to fast-track elective surgeries, focusing on surgery delayed by COVID-19.

The 2021-22 budget for Hunter New England Local Health District is nearly \$2.54 billion, an increase of almost \$95 million, or 3.9 per cent more, on the previous year's budget.

Between mid-2012 and mid-2021, the District increased its workforce by an additional 1,633 full-time equivalent staff - an increase of 15.5 per cent including 400 more doctors, 905 more nurses and midwives and 156 more allied health staff.

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