

MEDIA RELEASE

Wait times for surgery and emergency department treatment improve

A new report by the Bureau of Health Information shows waiting times across NSW emergency departments have fallen while the number of people visiting emergency has increased by 13,000 compared to the same quarter last year.

The Bureau's *Hospital Quarterly* report provides a regular snapshot of emergency departments and elective surgery activity in NSW public hospitals.

The first quarter of 2013 shows a clear improvement from the same quarter last year in the time patients waited to be seen in emergency departments.

Overall the time patients spent in emergency departments fell, with 65% of all patients leaving the emergency department within four hours, an improvement of five percentage points on the same time last year. This year the national target for patients leaving emergency departments within four hours (National Emergency Access Target) increased to 71%.

"Our report shows that patients generally spent less time waiting in the emergency department before they could be treated, and there was also a reduction in the total time before they left the emergency department," Bureau Chief Executive Dr Jean-Frederic Levesque said.

"Overall the times that patients waited to begin treatment in the emergency department have generally decreased over the last two years and are similar to the times seen five years ago, despite an increase in patients.

"During the quarter there was an increase in emergency department patients who were assessed as being more urgent on arrival, alongside a reduction in patients assessed as being non-urgent.

"There were also more hospitalisations in NSW public hospitals without an increase in bed days. This suggests that hospitals are responding to increasing demand by making hospital stays shorter."

The report also looks at elective surgery in NSW hospitals and shows an improvement in the percentage of patients who received surgery within the recommended timeframe, at 95%, up from 91% in the same quarter last year. The improvement was particularly marked for patients needing urgent and semi-urgent surgery.

More than 99% of elective surgery patients were treated on time in 41 hospitals across NSW.

"Overall the report shows waiting times in emergency departments and for elective surgery have decreased. There has been progress towards achieving the national emergency access target, but many hospitals fell short of the 2013 target in this quarter," Dr Levesque said.

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