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New report shows demand for NSW emergency department, ambulance services continues to grow

The Bureau of Health Information (BHI) has today released its latest *Healthcare Quarterly* report, showing activity and performance for public health services in NSW during April to June 2024.

There were 795,817 **emergency department** (ED) attendances in April to June 2024 – up 3.3% from the same quarter a year earlier. EDs continued to see more patients with the most urgent clinical conditions, with more patients allocated to the three most serious triage categories than in any quarter since BHI began reporting in 2010.

Just 63.7% of patients started their treatment on time – down 2.1 percentage points compared with the same quarter a year earlier.

Ambulance activity reached a new record of 385,345 responses, up 7.8% on the same time a year earlier. Despite the increase, response times remained relatively stable.

BHI Chief Executive Dr Diane Watson said the record demand for ambulance and ED services in recent quarters cannot simply be explained by the increasing NSW population.

“BHI conducted special analysis of the past decade of data to determine to what extent increasing demand has been driven by population growth,” Dr Watson said.

“Demand for ED and ambulance services has outpaced NSW population growth since 2017–18. During this period, ED attendances grew 3.4% faster than the population, even after accounting for the state’s increasing average age, while ambulance responses grew 4.5% faster than the population in the last year of analysis alone, between 2021–22 and 2022–23.”

Healthcare Quarterly also shows that in April to June 2024, there were 59,105 **elective surgeries** performed. At the end of June, there were 1,859 patients on the elective surgery waiting list who had waited longer than clinically recommended – down significantly from 9,107 at the same time in 2023.

The Insights Series – Patients' experiences of hospital care over time

BHI also released a second report that reveals important new insights into more than 200,000 people’s experiences as admitted or ED patients in NSW public hospitals since 2018, focusing on kind and compassionate care, effective communication and information, and discharge planning.

The Insights Series – Patients' experiences of hospital care over time highlights where ratings of care at NSW level and for individual local health districts have significantly improved or declined, and where results stayed consistently high or low.

For example, the report shows that between 2018–19 and 2022–23, the percentage of ED patients who said that ED staff checked on their condition while they were waiting to be treated improved significantly at NSW level and across most districts.

However, the percentage of patients who said they ‘definitely’ felt involved in decisions about their discharge from the ED declined significantly.

“Evidence suggests improvements in patients’ experiences are likely to enhance clinical effectiveness and reduce the risk of readmission to hospital,” Dr Watson said.

The Insights Series – Patients' experiences of hospital care over time as well as detailed results for *Healthcare Quarterly* are available at bhi.nsw.gov.au

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