

17 June 2020

## Extraordinary quarter for NSW public health system

The Bureau of Health information (BHI) has today released its latest *Healthcare Quarterly* report, showing activity and performance for public hospital and ambulance services in NSW during January to March 2020.

BHI Chief Executive Dr Diane Watson said it was an extraordinary quarter for the people of NSW and their healthcare system.

“In early January, the bushfire crisis was at its peak and it continued through that month, becoming the most devastating bushfire season on record. Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic would go on to dramatically and rapidly change the world we live in well before the end of March,” Dr Watson said.

BHI has published a special supplement to this issue of *Healthcare Quarterly*, to provide additional information on levels of activity for NSW during March 2020, when cases of COVID-19 peaked.

“March, in particular, saw far-reaching changes to people’s lives and a large scale response to the COVID-19 pandemic by the health system,” Dr Watson said.

Overall, for January to March 2020, there were 764,658 emergency department (ED) attendances, up 1.1% (8,581) compared with the same quarter the previous year. More than seven in 10 ED patients (74.1%) were treated on time, up 2.1 percentage points.

Levels of ED activity in March 2020 were similar to March 2019, down just 0.5%. However, there were notable declines in presentations in triage categories 2 (emergency), 3 (urgent) and 4 (semi-urgent) throughout the month, which were offset by a striking 89.5% increase in presentations in triage category 5 (non-urgent).

“These additional non-urgent presentations were concentrated in metropolitan hospitals and the increase started in the weeks before dedicated COVID-19 clinics were established,” Dr Watson said.

The number of elective surgical procedures performed during January to March was 50,810, down 4.4% (2,325) compared with the same quarter in 2019, with most procedures (93.9%) performed on time, down 2.5 percentage points.

From 26 March, the National Cabinet suspended all non-urgent elective surgery, with all urgent and some exceptional semi-urgent surgery continuing. The number of semi-urgent procedures was down 16.2% in March 2020 compared with March 2019 and the number of non-urgent procedures was down 26.3%.

The number of patients on the waiting list for semi-urgent procedures as at 31 March 2020 was unchanged (at 12,734). For non-urgent procedures, the number of patients on the waiting list was up 10.7% (to 76,086) compared with 31 March 2019.

BHI has also today released a report that examines readmissions to 74 public hospitals in NSW for eight clinical conditions, including three surgical procedures, for July 2015 to June 2018.

Detailed results from both *Healthcare Quarterly* and *Readmission and returns to acute care following hospitalisation for eight clinical conditions, July 2015 – June 2018* are available at [bhi.nsw.gov.au](http://bhi.nsw.gov.au)

**SPOKESPERSON:** **Diane Watson** Chief Executive, Bureau of Health Information  
**Hilary Rowell** Senior Director, Bureau of Health Information

**MEDIA CONTACT:** **Michael Cleggett** (02) 9464 4441 or 0475 946 065