

One quarter of NSW children visit an emergency department in a year

A new report from the Bureau of Health Information (BHI) shows that children who attend NSW emergency departments spend less time there than other age groups.

The report, *Healthcare performance across the life span, Volume 2*, uses a range of data sources to explore three different types of healthcare services provided to children and young people (aged 0–17 years); emergency department visits, hospital admissions and elective surgeries.

BHI Chief Executive, Dr Jean-Frederic Levesque, said the report was the first time that children's use of emergency departments in NSW had been examined in detail.

"The report shows that in 2013–14, one quarter (24%) of all children in NSW visited an emergency department, including 44% of babies in their first year of life," Dr Levesque said.

"As a group, children wait a similar amount of time as other age groups to start treatment in the emergency department; however, babies aged up to one year experienced longer waiting times in most triage categories.

"Overall, children spend less time in emergency departments. In 2014–15, 83% of this age group spent four hours or less in the emergency department, which compares favourably to NSW as a whole at 72%."

In terms of elective surgery:

- In 2014–15, 10% of all elective surgical procedures performed in NSW public hospitals were for children (21,984 in total)
- Tonsillectomy was the most commonly performed procedure (4,314 in total)
- Across the age groups, children aged 5–12 years had the longest median waiting time* for non-urgent surgery (271 days). It is recommended that non urgent surgery is completed within 365 days.

In terms of hospitalisations:

- In 2012–13, 10% of acute overnight hospital admissions in NSW were for children (115,751 in total)
- Respiratory diseases and 'injury, poisoning and other external causes' were the most common reasons for hospitalisation
- A very small group of patients had high levels of hospitalisations – 0.3% of all children (4,733) were hospitalised three or more times in the year, accounting for 31% of the total number of bed days used by that age group.

This report also provides the first assessment of how specialist paediatric hospitals - Sydney Children's Hospital, The Children's Hospital at Westmead and John Hunter Children's Hospital - and non-paediatric hospitals in NSW deliver care for children of various ages.

"Median waiting times for elective surgery were shorter at specialist paediatric hospitals compared with non-paediatric hospitals; however specialist paediatric hospitals completed a smaller proportion of surgery within clinically recommended timeframes," Dr Levesque said.

The full report is available on the BHI website at bhi.nsw.gov.au

* **Media note:** The median waiting time is the time by which half of patients received their surgery. The other half of patients waited at least this long for their surgery.

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