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Healthcare system in rural and remote NSW is performing strongly

A new report by the Bureau of Health Information (BHI), released today at the NSW Rural Health & Research Congress, shows patients in rural and remote NSW receive good quality healthcare.

The report, *The Insights Series: Healthcare in rural, regional and remote NSW*, brings together a wide range of information sources and includes 100 indicators to assess healthcare provided to the people of NSW across rural and urban settings.

BHI Chief Executive Dr Jean-Frederic Levesque said healthcare systems in rural and remote NSW face unique challenges but when managed appropriately, can provide effective, integrated and safe care.

“Long travelling times, low population density, limited opportunities for economies of scale and high staff turnover all place significant pressure upon the rural healthcare sector,” Dr Levesque said.

“When we look across a broad array of measures, the report shows that the rural sector performs well in terms of patient engagement, use of resources and coordination of care. Healthcare delivery is not a function of place.”

The report includes information from patient experiences of care in smaller hospitals in rural areas.

“Patients who visited smaller hospitals spent less time overall in the ED, and patients in rural hospitals were more likely to say they were involved, as much as they wanted to be, in decisions about their care and treatment; about their discharge; and about medications,” Dr Levesque said.

In general, patients in rural hospitals reported better experiences of care and fewer complications than patients in urban hospitals.

Fewer residents had to travel outside their LHD for cancer care in 2014-15, compared to ten years earlier. A survey of cancer outpatients highlighted rural clinics as among the best performers in the state.

Over 97% of elective surgery was performed within clinically recommended timeframes regardless of the location of the hospital, but median waiting times were longer in inner regional hospitals.

Potential areas for improvement include:

- Emergency department re-presentations were more common in rural hospitals
- There were bigger gaps in experiences of hospital care between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal patients in rural areas compared with urban areas.

The report presents comparisons with Canada and Sweden, which share key characteristics with NSW in regards to rurality, and NSW performed well against both of these countries.

The report and data are available at bhi.nsw.gov.au

SPOKESPERSON: Dr Jean-Frederic Levesque Chief Executive, Bureau of Health Information

MEDIA CONTACT: Stephanie Watson (02) 9464 4441 or 0472 806 635