

Trend report

Emergency department, ambulance, admitted patients, seclusion and restraint, and elective surgery

October to December 2020



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Please note there is the potential for minor revisions of data in this report.

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The conclusions in this report are those of BHI and no official endorsement by the NSW Minister for Health, the NSW Ministry of Health or any other NSW public health organisation is intended or should be inferred.

Full results for *Healthcare Quarterly* are available through BHI's interactive data portal, Healthcare Observer. Results are reported at a state, local health district, hospital peer group and hospital level for public hospitals and at a state level and by statistical area level 3 (SA3) for ambulance services.

Figures published in Healthcare Observer may differ from those in published reports and information products due to subsequent changes in data coverage and analytic methods, and updates to databases. At any time, the most up-to-date results are available in Healthcare Observer and supersede all previously published figures.

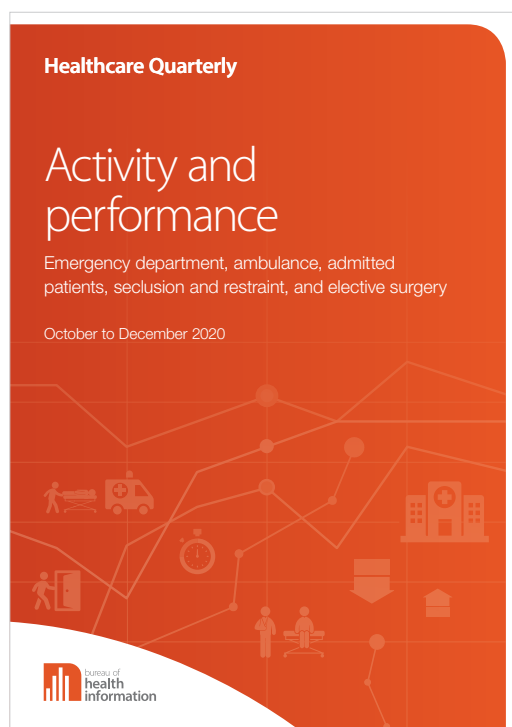
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Table of contents

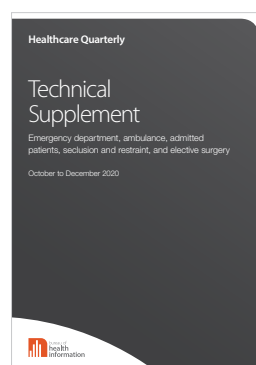
Emergency department activity and performance	3
Emergency department attendances	4
Emergency presentations by triage category	5
Emergency department attendances by mode of arrival	6
Emergency department attendances by mode of separation	7
Time to treatment	8
Time spent in the emergency department	10
Percentage of patient stays of four hours or less	12
Transfer of care	14
Ambulance activity and performance	17
Ambulance activity	18
Ambulance responses by priority	19
Ambulance performance	20
Admitted patient activity	23
Admitted patients	24
Hospital bed days for admitted patients	26
Average length of stay in hospital	27
Seclusion and restraint	29
Seclusion events and rate	30
Restraint events and rate	32
Seclusion and restraint duration	34
Elective surgery activity and performance	37
Elective surgery	38
Percentage of elective surgery on time	39
Waiting time and waiting list for elective surgery	40

A guide to Healthcare Quarterly

Healthcare Quarterly reports on activity and performance for public hospital and ambulance services across NSW.



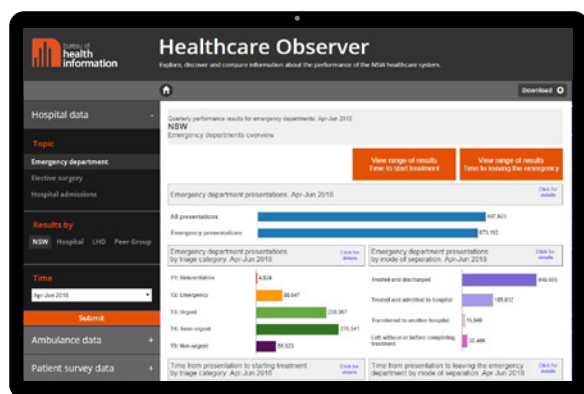
The *Trend report* provides five-year trends in activity and performance for emergency departments, ambulance services, admitted patients and elective surgical procedures.



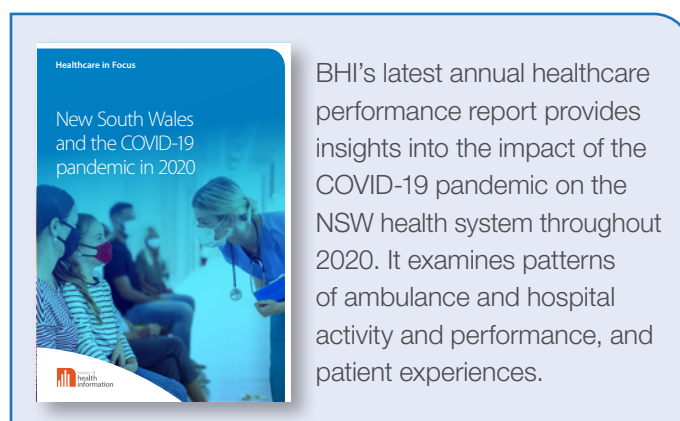
The technical supplement describes the data, methods and technical terms used to calculate activity and performance measures.

Healthcare Quarterly shows how public hospitals and ambulance services performed in the October to December 2020 quarter. The key measures focus on the timeliness of services delivered to people across NSW.

All reports and profiles are available at bhi.nsw.gov.au



Full results are available from BHI's interactive data portal Healthcare Observer, at bhi.nsw.gov.au/healthcare_observer



BHI's latest annual healthcare performance report provides insights into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the NSW health system throughout 2020. It examines patterns of ambulance and hospital activity and performance, and patient experiences.

About this report

This *Trend report* provides five-year trends in activity and performance for emergency departments (EDs), ambulance services, admitted patients and elective surgical procedures.

Activity and performance are reported at NSW level over a five-year period. For hospital-based measures, results are stratified by peer group or acuity. For ambulance-based measures, results are stratified by urgency.

Activity measures are reported by counts of events or proportion within the total events. Timeliness measures are reported based on units of time such as minutes or days using median and 90th percentile times, or based on achievement against a recommended or defined time.

For more information on the October to December 2020 quarter refer to *Healthcare Quarterly – Activity and performance*.

Table 1 Description of main measures featured in *Healthcare Quarterly – Trend report**

Emergency departments	
ED attendances	Count of all patient visits to the ED during the defined period.
Emergency presentations	The vast majority of ED attendances are classified as emergency presentations. The remaining ED attendances include non-emergency visits such as planned returns, pre-arranged admissions, some outpatient visits and private referrals.
Transfer of care time	For patients who are transported to the ED by ambulance, the time from arrival at hospital to when responsibility for their care is transferred from paramedics to ED staff in an ED treatment zone.
Time to start treatment	The time from patient arrival at an ED until the start of clinical treatment.
Time spent in the ED	The time from patient arrival at the ED until their departure.
Ambulance	
Number of incidents	Count of all events requiring one or more ambulance responses.
Number of responses	Count of all dispatches of an ambulance service vehicle.
Call to ambulance arrival time	The time from when a call is first answered in the ambulance control centre (phone pick-up), to the time the first ambulance arrives at the scene of an incident.
Response time	The time from when a call for an ambulance is placed 'in queue' for vehicle dispatch by the ambulance control centre to the time the first vehicle arrives at the scene.
Admitted patients	
Total episodes	Episode of care is a period of care in a hospital or other healthcare facility with a defined start and end. Total episodes is the count of all records with an episode end date in the defined period.
Total bed days	Bed days are calculated for all admitted patient episodes completed during the reference period. Total acute bed days is the sum of bed days for all acute episodes with an episode end date within the defined period.
Elective surgery	
Elective surgery waiting time	The number of days from a patient's placement on the elective surgery waiting list until they undergo surgery.

* For some measures, other agencies report similar metrics, often with slightly different data definitions, so cross-publication comparisons should be made with care.



Emergency department activity and performance

Emergency department attendances

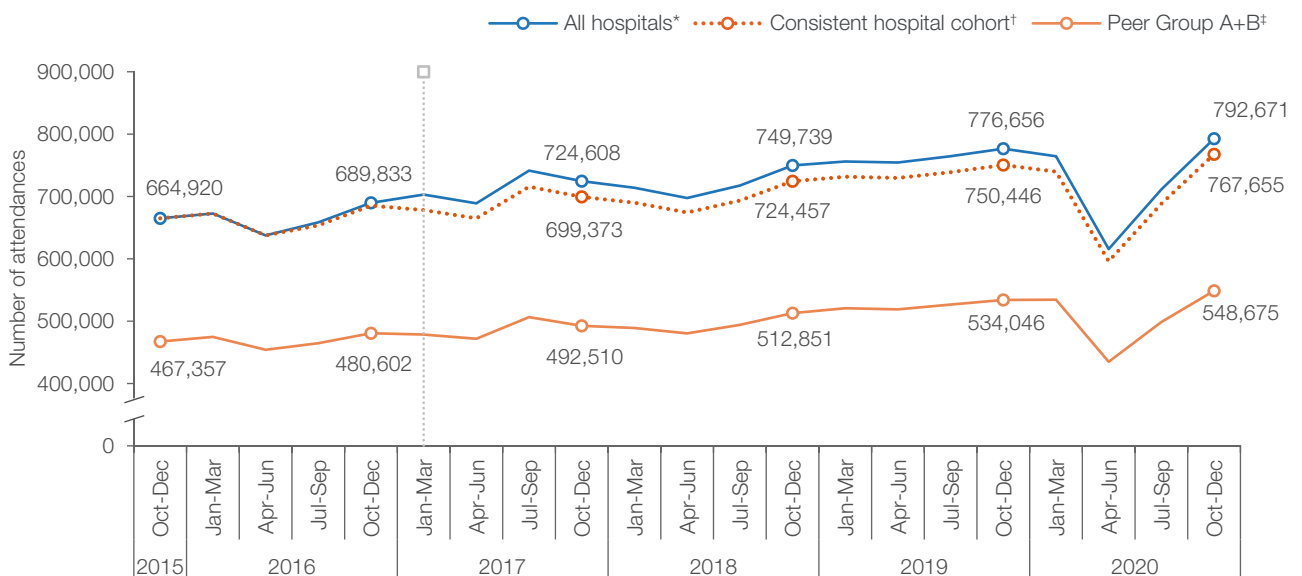
Five-year trends in emergency department (ED) activity show how demands on the system and the supply of services have changed over time. ED activity can be influenced by factors such as outbreaks, weather events and population growth. Seasonal variation can also play a role when demand for services changes predictably through the year.

Following a sharp decrease in the first half of 2020, ED attendances for all hospitals increased to 792,671 in October to December 2020, the highest of any quarter in the five-year period (Figure 1).

For the consistent hospital cohort and the larger EDs in peer groups A and B, October to December 2020 had more ED attendances than any quarter in the five-year period (Figure 1).

Of the 792,671 ED attendances in October to December 2020, 28,679 (3.6%) were identified as patients likely to be only in the ED for a COVID-19 test. For more information on the impact of COVID-19 testing on ED activity and performance, please see page 18 of *Healthcare Quarterly – Activity and performance, October to December 2020*, available at bhi.nsw.gov.au

Figure 1 Emergency department attendances, October 2015 to December 2020



* 'All hospitals' cohort includes all EDs submitting valid data to the Emergency Department Data Collection (EDDC) in each quarter. This includes more than 170 EDs as of the January to March 2017 quarter.
 † A consistent cohort of hospitals was used to report ED presentations so that comparisons of presentations over longer intervals will not be affected by inclusion of additional EDs.
 ‡ Peer group A+B cohort includes all hospitals in peer groups A1, A2, A3 and B.
 †† Change in hospital cohort: in the January to March 2017 quarter, an additional 44 EDs were included in *Healthcare Quarterly*, contributing to activity and performance results. See the technical supplement to this *Healthcare Quarterly* for further information.

Emergency presentations by triage category

Reporting emergency presentations by triage category provides information on changes in the urgency of patients.

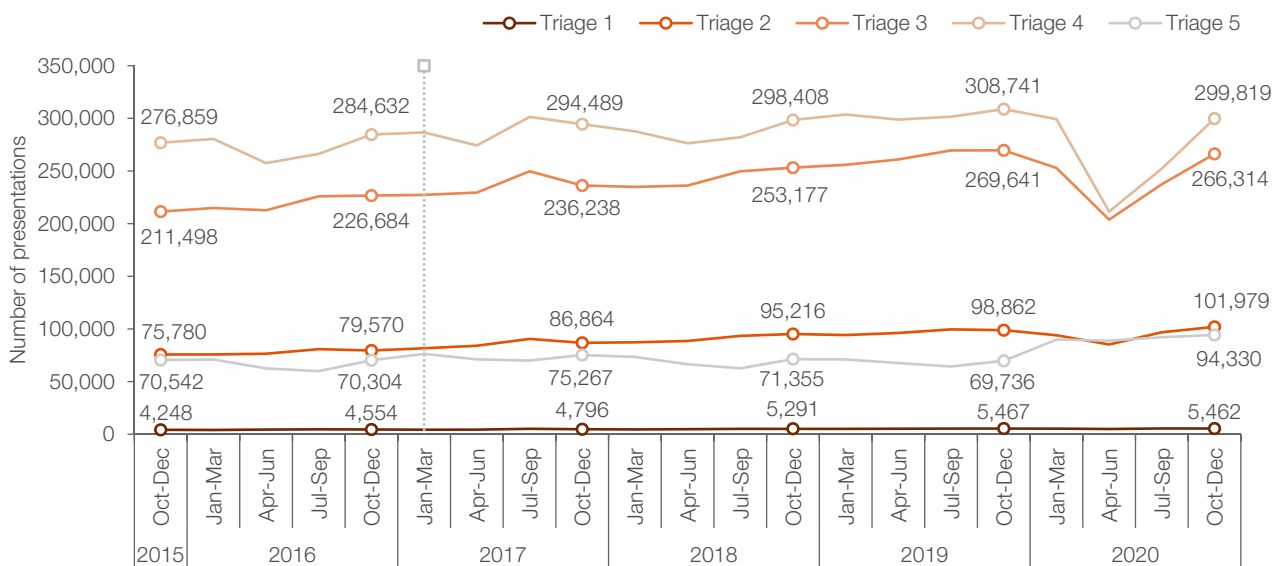
In October to December 2020, emergency presentations across all triage categories returned to levels similar to those seen before the COVID-19 pandemic. October to December 2020 had the highest number of emergency presentations for triage 2 (emergency) and triage 5 (non-urgent) of any quarter in the five-year period (Figure 2).

The increase in triage 5 presentations is primarily due to COVID-19 testing provided by emergency departments. For more information on the impact of COVID-19 testing on ED activity and performance, please see page 18 of *Healthcare Quarterly – Activity and performance, October to December 2020*, available at bhi.nsw.gov.au

Percentage of emergency presentations by triage category, October to December quarters from 2015 to 2020

Category	October–December					
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Triage 1 (%)	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7
Triage 2 (%)	11.9	12.0	12.5	13.2	13.1	13.3
Triage 3 (%)	33.1	34.0	33.9	35.0	35.8	34.7
Triage 4 (%)	43.3	42.8	42.2	41.2	41.0	39.0
Triage 5 (%)	11.0	10.6	10.8	9.9	9.3	12.3

Figure 2 Emergency presentations by triage category, October 2015 to December 2020



Notes: Results are calculated from all EDs submitting data to EDDC in each quarter. In recent years, more than 170 EDs are included in *Healthcare Quarterly*.
 †: Change in hospital cohort: in the January to March 2017 quarter, an additional 44 EDs were included in *Healthcare Quarterly*, contributing to activity and performance results. See the technical supplement to this *Healthcare Quarterly* for further information.

Emergency department attendances by mode of arrival

The mode of arrival refers to the form of transport by which a person arrives at the ED.

Despite decreasing in April to June 2020, the number of arrivals at the ED by ambulance increased by 23.7% from 140,659 in October to December 2015 to 174,002 in October to December 2020, the highest of any October to December quarter in the five-year period (Figure 3).

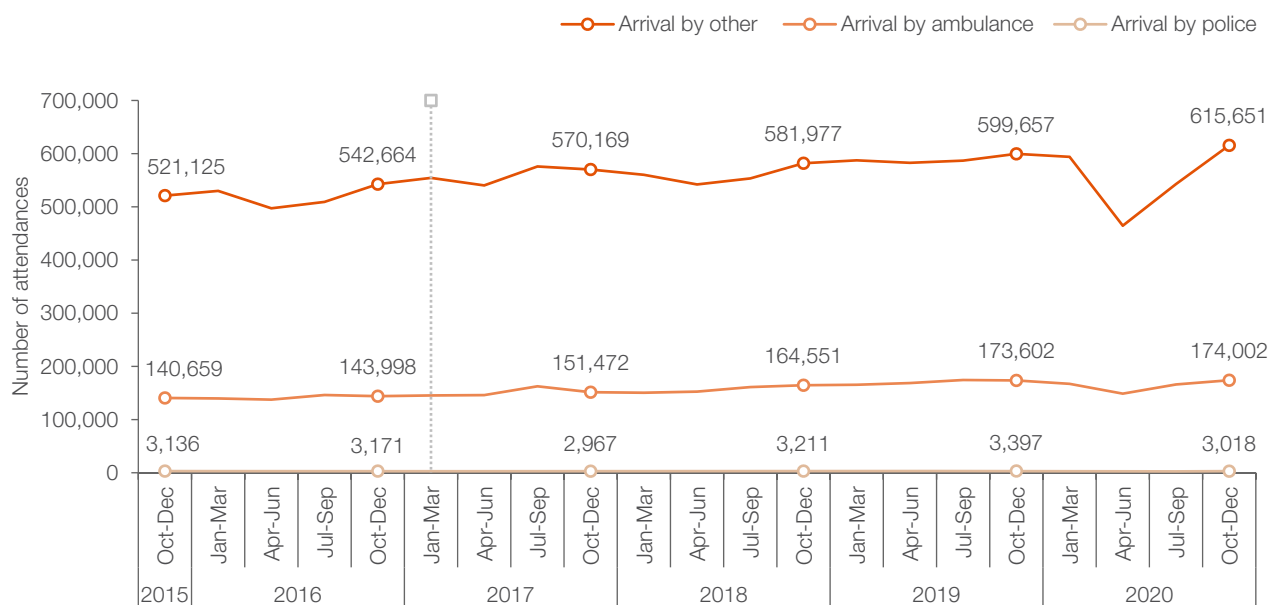
The majority of ED attendances had an arrival mode of 'other', indicating the patient most likely came by a private vehicle, community/public transport, internal ambulance/transport, or walked into the ED. In October to December 2020, these arrivals increased to 615,651, the highest of any quarter in the five-year period (Figure 3).

Percentage of ED attendances by mode of arrival, October to December quarters from 2015 to 2020

Mode of arrival	October–December					
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Ambulance (%)	21.2	20.9	20.9	21.9	22.4	22.0
Police (%)	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4
Other (%)	78.4	78.7	78.7	77.6	77.2	77.7

Note: 'Other' mode of arrival includes: private vehicle, community/public transport, no transport (walked in), internal ambulance/transport and other (e.g. undertakers/contractors, retrieval [including NETS] and internal bed/wheelchair). Presentations with missing mode of arrival are also included in this cohort.

Figure 3 Emergency department attendances by mode of arrival, October 2015 to December 2020



Notes: Results are calculated from all EDs submitting data to EDDC in each quarter. In recent years, more than 170 EDs are included in *Healthcare Quarterly*. [†] Change in hospital cohort: in the January to March 2017 quarter, an additional 44 EDs were included in *Healthcare Quarterly*, contributing to activity and performance results. See the technical supplement to this *Healthcare Quarterly* for further information.

Emergency department attendances by mode of separation

The mode of separation describes a patient's status (discharge/admitted/transfer) when they left the ED.

Following treatment in the ED, the majority of patients are either discharged or admitted to hospital. Some patients choose not to wait for treatment and leave, and others are transferred to a different hospital.

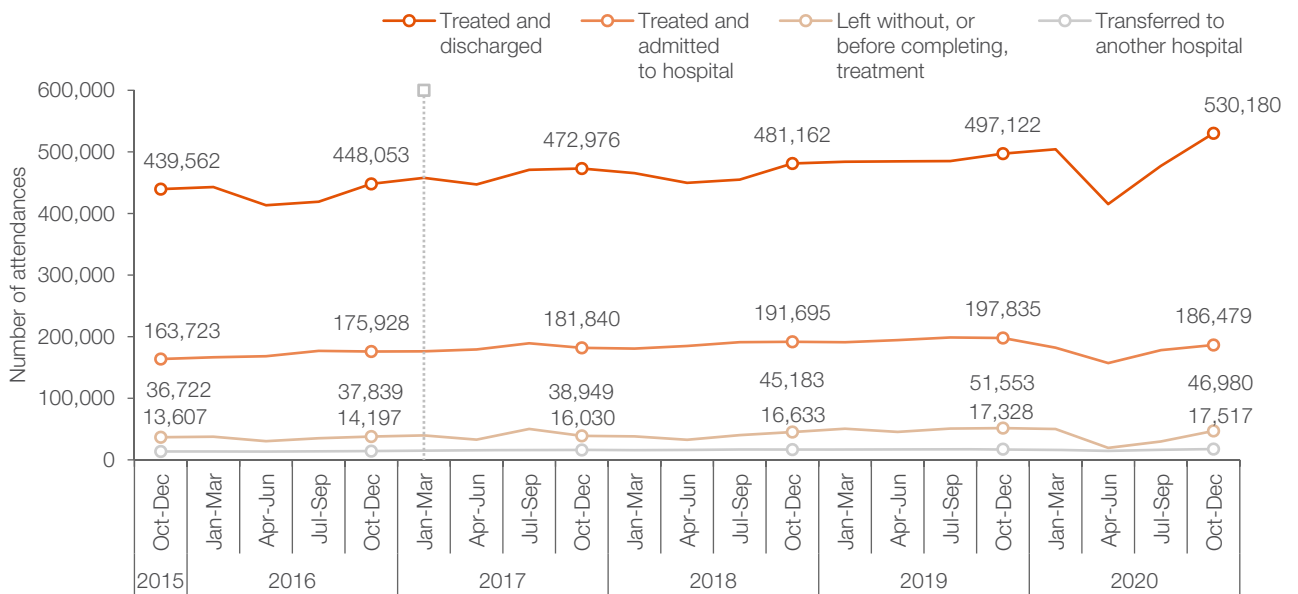
Despite decreasing in April to June 2020, the number of ED attendances increased across all modes of separation over five years.

In October to December 2020, the numbers of patients who were treated and discharged, or transferred to a different hospital were highest of any quarter in the five-year period (Figure 4).

Percentage of ED attendances by mode of separation, October to December quarters from 2015 to 2020

Mode of separation	October–December					
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Treated and discharged (%)	66.1	65.0	65.3	64.2	64.0	66.9
Treated and admitted (%)	24.6	25.5	25.1	25.6	25.5	23.5
Transferred (%)	2.0	2.1	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2
Left without, or before completing, treatment (%)	5.5	5.5	5.4	6.0	6.6	5.9

Figure 4 Emergency department attendances by mode of separation, October 2015 to December 2020



Notes: Results are calculated from all EDs submitting data to EDDC in each quarter. In recent years, more than 170 EDs are included in *Healthcare Quarterly*.
 †: Change in hospital cohort: in the January to March 2017 quarter, an additional 44 EDs were included in *Healthcare Quarterly*, contributing to activity and performance results. See the technical supplement to this *Healthcare Quarterly* for further information.

Time to treatment

Upon arrival at the ED, patients are allocated to one of five triage categories, based on urgency. For each category, the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine recommends a threshold waiting time within which treatment should start:

- **Triage 1:** Resuscitation (within 2 minutes)*
- **Triage 2:** Emergency (80% within 10 minutes)
- **Triage 3:** Urgent (75% within 30 minutes)
- **Triage 4:** Semi-urgent (70% within 60 minutes)
- **Triage 5:** Non-urgent (70% within 120 minutes).

In October to December 2020, the percentage of patients whose treatment started on time returned to levels similar to those seen before the COVID-19 pandemic for all patients and across triage categories 2 to 5 (Figure 5).

The median time patients waited for treatment refers to the time from arrival at the ED in which half of the patients began treatment. The waiting time for the other half was either equal to this time or longer.

The 90th percentile time gives a sense of the longest waiting times for treatment. It is the time from arrival by which 90% of patients received treatment.

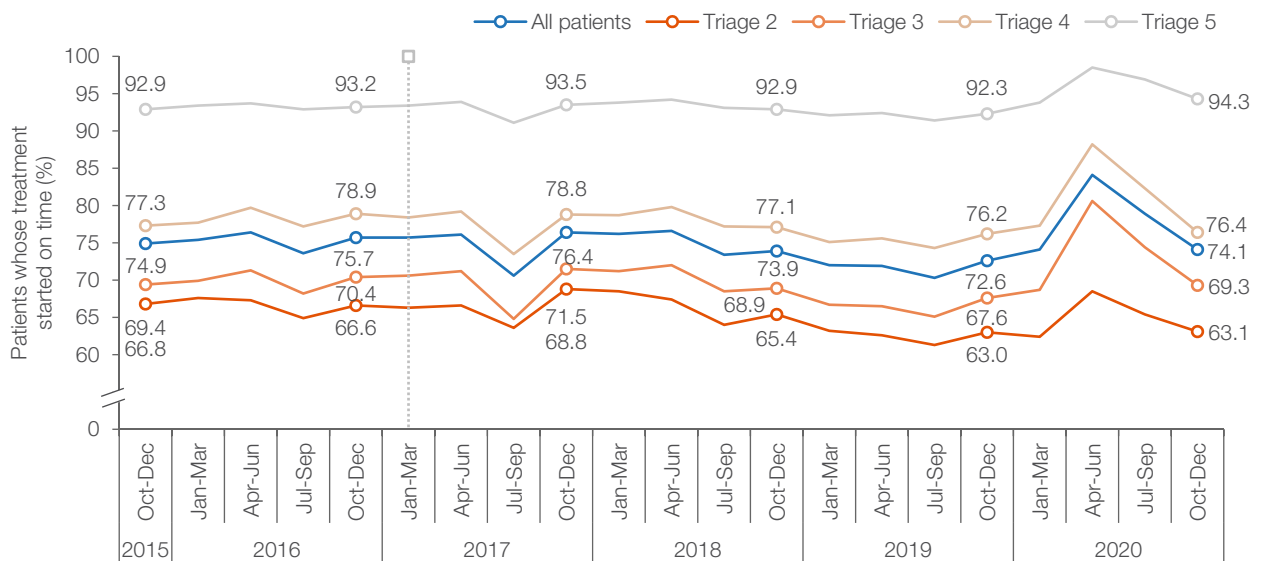
The waiting time for the remaining 10% of patients was equal to this time or longer.

The median and 90th percentile time patients waited for treatment for triage category 2 remained relatively stable over five years (Figures 6, 7).

Following a sharp decrease in the first half of 2020, the median and 90th percentile time to treatment for triage categories 3 and 4 returned to levels similar to those seen before the COVID-19 pandemic. The median and 90th percentile times for triage 5 presentations were the lowest of any October to December quarter in the five-year period (Figures 6, 7).

Due to differences in data definitions, period of reporting and the number of hospitals included, *Healthcare Quarterly* results for the percentage of patients whose treatment started on time are not directly comparable with figures reported by other agencies and jurisdictions. For more information refer to the *Healthcare Quarterly* technical supplement at bhi.nsw.gov.au

Figure 5 Percentage of patients whose treatment started on time, by triage category*, October 2015 to December 2020

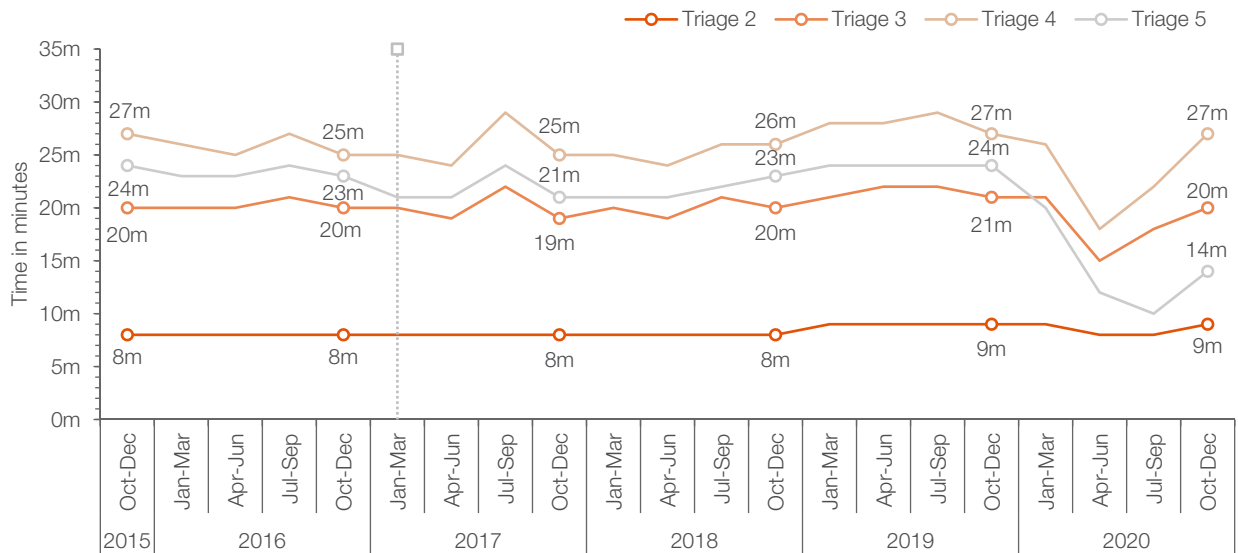


* Triage 1 patients are the most urgent and are almost all treated within two minutes. Clinicians are focused on providing immediate and essential care, rather than recording times, therefore times to start treatment are generally not reported.

Note: Results are calculated from all EDs submitting data to EDDC in each quarter. In recent years, more than 170 EDs are included in *Healthcare Quarterly*.

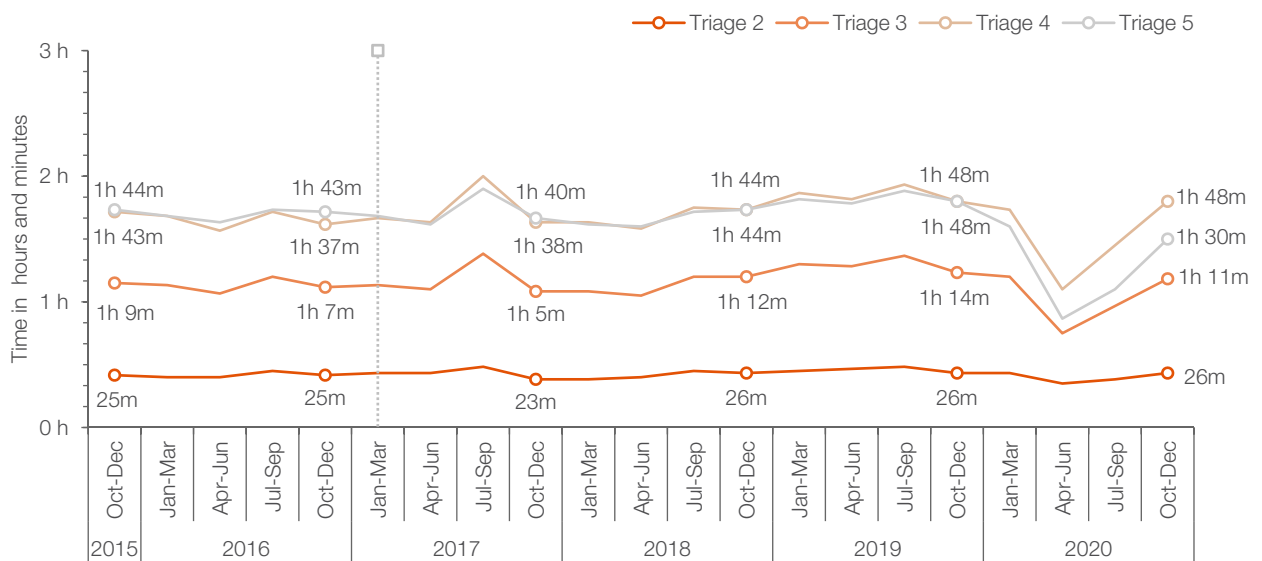
† Change in hospital cohort: in the January to March 2017 quarter, an additional 44 EDs were included in *Healthcare Quarterly*, contributing to activity and performance results. See the technical supplement to this *Healthcare Quarterly* for further information.

Figure 6 Median time from presentation to starting treatment, by triage category*, October 2015 to December 2020



* Triage 1 patients are the most urgent and are almost all treated within two minutes. Clinicians are focused on providing immediate and essential care, rather than recording times, therefore times to start treatment are generally not reported.
 Note: Results are calculated from all EDs submitting data to EDDC in each quarter. In recent years, more than 170 EDs are included in *Healthcare Quarterly*.
 † Change in hospital cohort: in the January to March 2017 quarter, an additional 44 EDs were included in *Healthcare Quarterly*, contributing to activity and performance results. See the technical supplement to this *Healthcare Quarterly* for further information.

Figure 7 90th percentile time from presentation to starting treatment, by triage category*, October 2015 to December 2020



* Triage 1 patients are the most urgent and are almost all treated within two minutes. Clinicians are focused on providing immediate and essential care, rather than recording times, therefore times to start treatment are generally not reported.
 Note: Results are calculated from all EDs submitting data to EDDC in each quarter. In recent years, more than 170 EDs are included in *Healthcare Quarterly*.
 † Change in hospital cohort: in the January to March 2017 quarter, an additional 44 EDs were included in *Healthcare Quarterly*, contributing to activity and performance results. See the technical supplement to this *Healthcare Quarterly* for further information.

Time spent in the emergency department

The length of time patients spent in the ED categorised by mode of separation provides information about the timeliness of transfer from ED to a hospital or ward, or how long patients stayed for treatment before discharge.

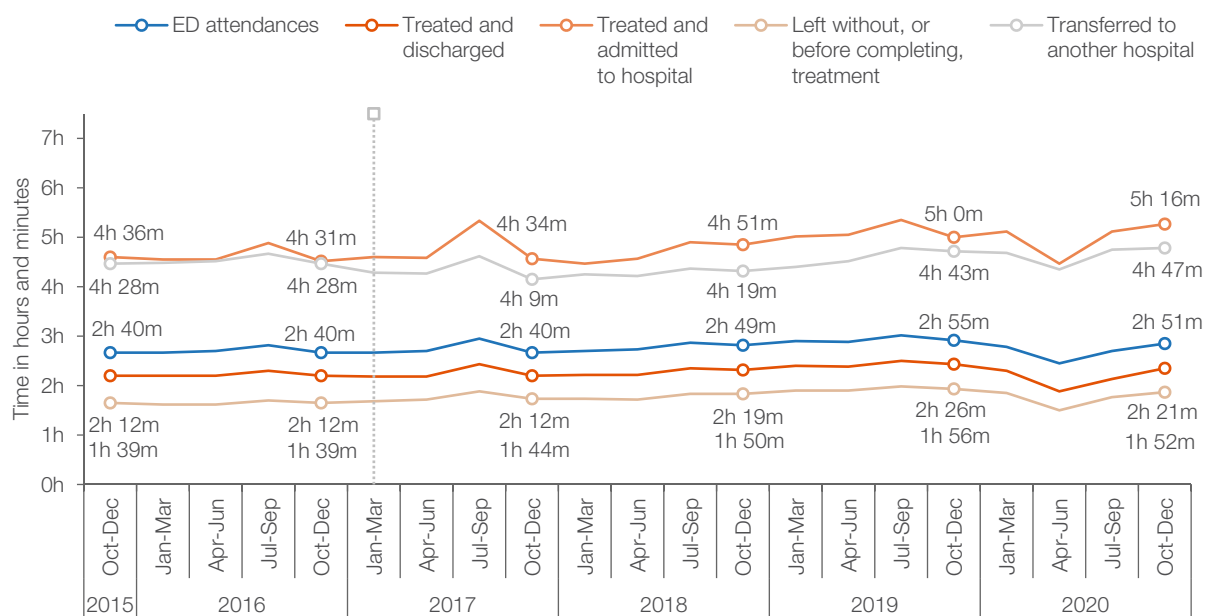
Median time spent in the ED

The median time patients spent in the ED refers to the time from arrival by which half of the patients had left the ED. The other half of patients spent equal to or longer than this time in the ED.

In October to December 2020, the median time spent in the ED across all modes of separation returned to levels similar to those seen before the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 8).

For patients admitted to hospital or transferred to another hospital, the median times spent in the ED were the longest of any October to December quarter in the five-year period (Figure 8).

Figure 8 Median time patients spent in the emergency department, by mode of separation, October 2015 to December 2020



Notes: Results are calculated from all EDs submitting data to EDCC in each quarter. In recent years, more than 170 EDs are included in *Healthcare Quarterly*.
 ¶: Change in hospital cohort: in the January to March 2017 quarter, an additional 44 EDs were included in *Healthcare Quarterly*, contributing to activity and performance results. See the technical supplement to this *Healthcare Quarterly* for further information.

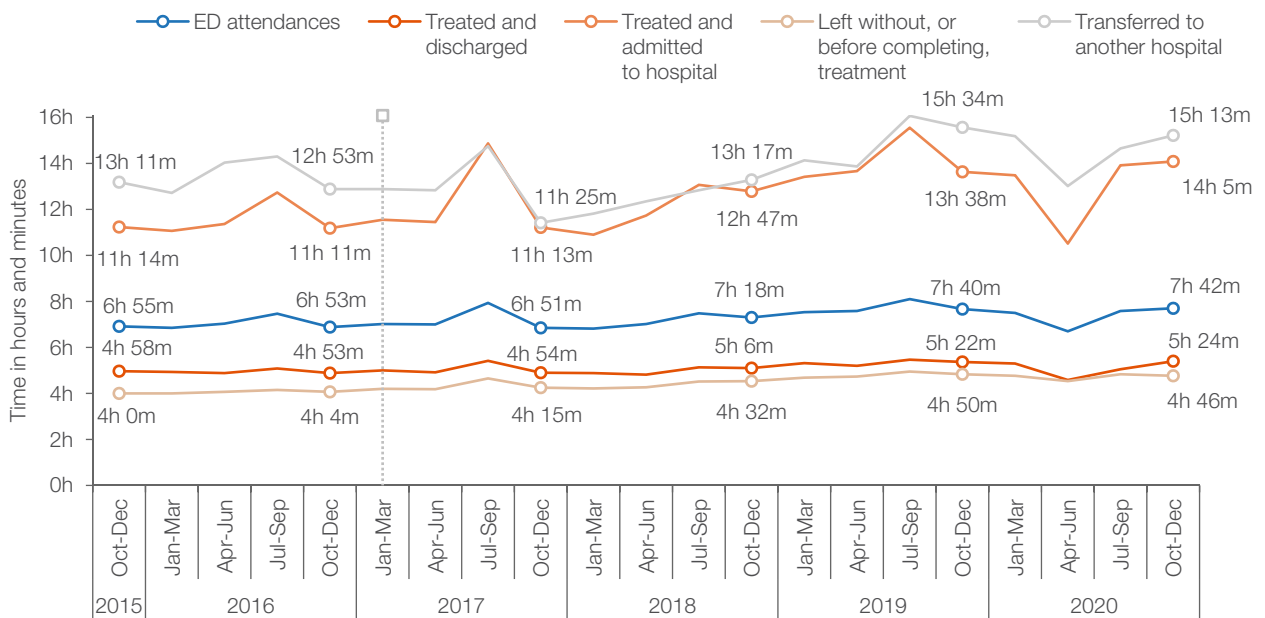
90th percentile time spent in the ED

The 90th percentile time gives a sense of the longest time patients spent in the ED. It is the time from arrival by which 90% of patients had left the ED. The time spent in the ED for the remaining 10% of patients was equal to this time or longer.

For patients treated and discharged or admitted to hospital, the 90th percentile times spent in the ED were the longest of any October to December quarter in the five-year period (Figure 9).

In October to December 2020, the 90th percentile time spent in the ED across all modes of separation returned to levels similar to those seen before the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 9).

Figure 9 90th percentile time patients spent in the emergency department, by mode of separation, October 2015 to December 2020



Notes: Results are calculated from all EDs submitting data to EDDC in each quarter. In recent years, more than 170 EDs are included in *Healthcare Quarterly*.
 ¶: Change in hospital cohort: in the January to March 2017 quarter, an additional 44 EDs were included in *Healthcare Quarterly*, contributing to activity and performance results. See the technical supplement to this *Healthcare Quarterly* for further information.

Percentage of patient stays of four hours or less

The percentage of patients who spent four hours or less in the ED was 69.8% in October to December 2020, unchanged compared with the same quarter the previous year (Figures 10, 11).

Variation by peer group

Presenting the percentage of patients who spent four hours or less in the ED by peer group acknowledges the differences in size and functions between hospitals (Figure 10). Hospital peer groups include: principal referral hospitals (peer group A1), major hospitals (peer group B) and district hospitals (peer group C).

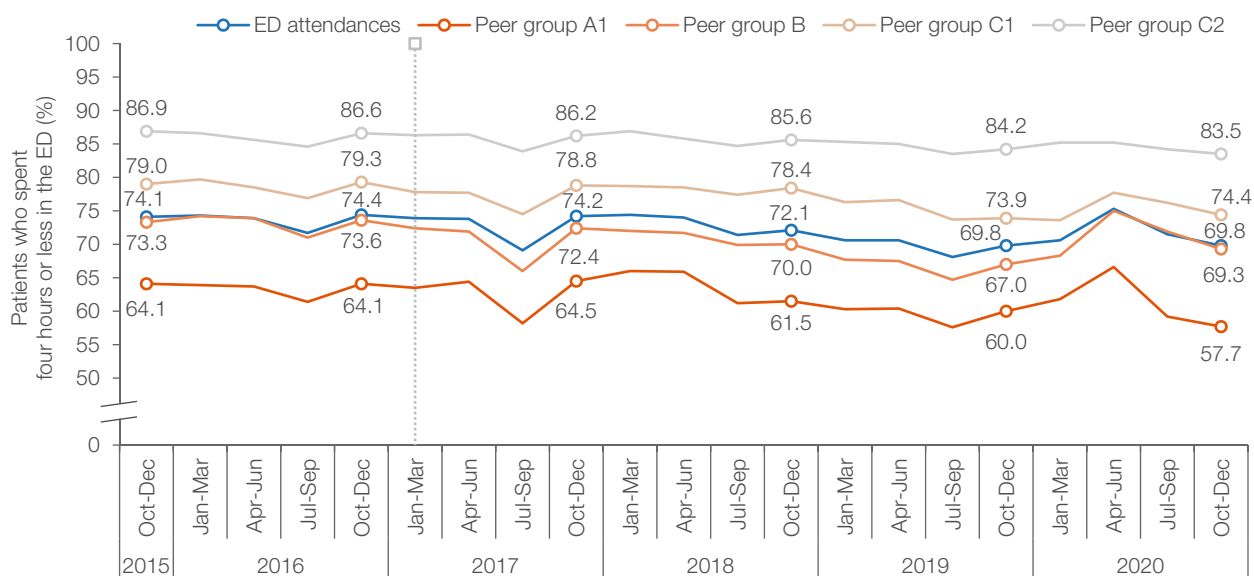
In October to December 2020, the percentage of patients who spent four hours or less in the ED

across peer group hospitals A1, B and C returned to a level similar to those seen before the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 10).

For peer groups A1 and C2 hospitals, October to December 2020 had the lowest percentage of patients who spent four hours or less in the ED of any October to December quarter in the five-year period (Figure 10).

Due to differences in data definitions, period of reporting and the number of hospitals included, *Healthcare Quarterly* results for the percentage of patients who spent four hours or less in the ED are not directly comparable with figures reported by other agencies and jurisdictions. For more information refer to the *Healthcare Quarterly* technical supplements at bhi.nsw.gov.au

Figure 10 Percentage of patients who spent four hours or less in the emergency department, by peer group, October 2015 to December 2020



Notes: Results are calculated from all EDs submitting data to EDDC in each quarter. In recent years, more than 170 EDs are included in *Healthcare Quarterly*.
 ▮ Change in hospital cohort: in the January to March 2017 quarter, an additional 44 EDs were included in *Healthcare Quarterly*, contributing to activity and performance results. See the technical supplement to this *Healthcare Quarterly* for further information.

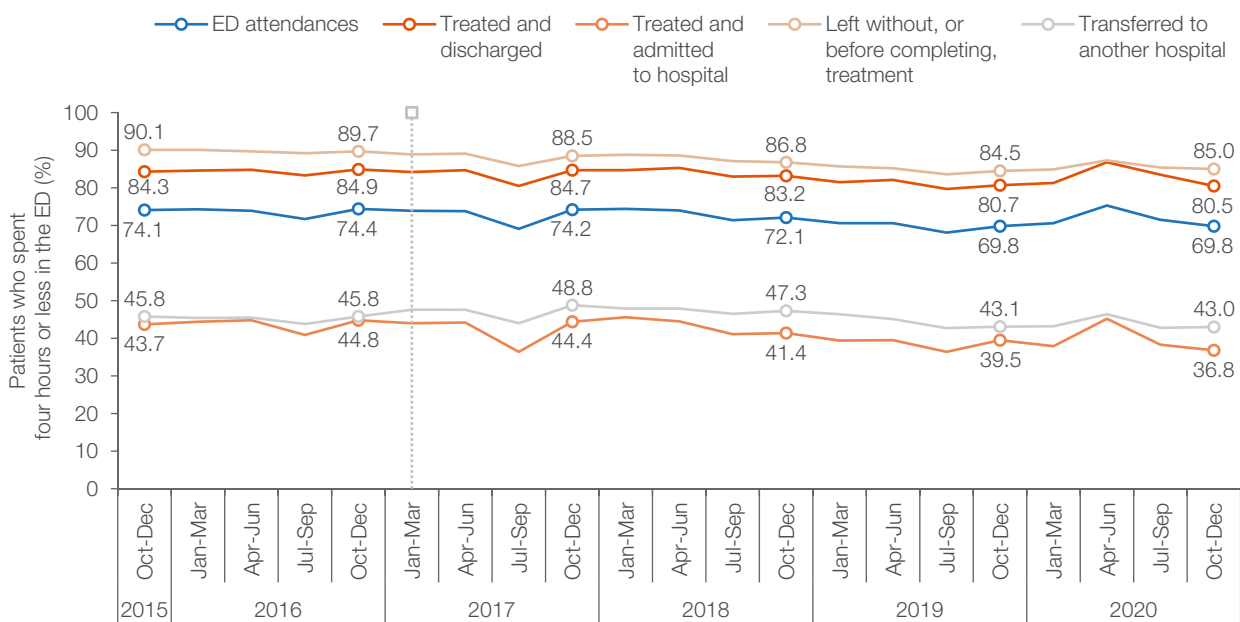
Variation by mode of separation

Patients who are treated and admitted to hospital from the ED or those who are transferred to another hospital tend to have more complex health needs, and therefore often spend longer periods in the ED (Figure 11).

For patients treated and discharged, admitted to hospital or transferred to another hospital, October to December 2020 had the lowest percentage of patients who spent four hours or less in the ED of any October to December quarter in the five-year period (Figure 11).

The percentage of patients who spent four hours or less in the ED decreased across all modes of separation over five years (Figure 11).

Figure 11 Percentage of patients who spent four hours or less in the emergency department, by mode of separation, October 2015 to December 2020



Notes: Results are calculated from all EDs submitting data to EDDC in each quarter. In recent years, more than 170 EDs are included in *Healthcare Quarterly*.
 ▮ Change in hospital cohort: in the January to March 2017 quarter, an additional 44 EDs were included in *Healthcare Quarterly*, contributing to activity and performance results. See the technical supplement to this *Healthcare Quarterly* for further information.

Transfer of care

When an ambulance arrives at an ED, care for the patient is transferred from the paramedics to ED staff. Transfer of care time is measured from when an ambulance arrives at the hospital to responsibility for a patient's care being transferred to ED staff. In NSW, the target for transfer of care from paramedics to ED staff is within 30 minutes for at least 90% of patients.

The percentage of ambulance arrivals with a transfer of care time within 30 minutes was 87.3% in October to December 2020, the lowest of any October to December quarter in the five-year period (Figure 12).

Median transfer of care time

The median transfer of care time refers to the time by which half of the patients had their care transferred from paramedics to ED staff. The transfer of care time for the other half of patients was either equal to this time or longer.

The median transfer of care time remained relatively stable over five years (Figure 13).

90th percentile transfer of care time

The 90th percentile transfer of care time gives a sense of the longest time for a patient's care to be transferred from paramedics to ED staff. It is the time by which 90% of patients had their care transferred from paramedics to ED staff. The transfer of care time for the remaining 10% of patients was equal to this time or longer (Figure 14).

The 90th percentile transfer of care time increased slightly over time. October to December 2020 had the longest 90th percentile transfer of care time of any October to December quarter in the five-year period (Figure 14).

Figure 12 Percentage of ambulance arrivals with transfer of care time within 30 minutes, October 2015 to December 2020

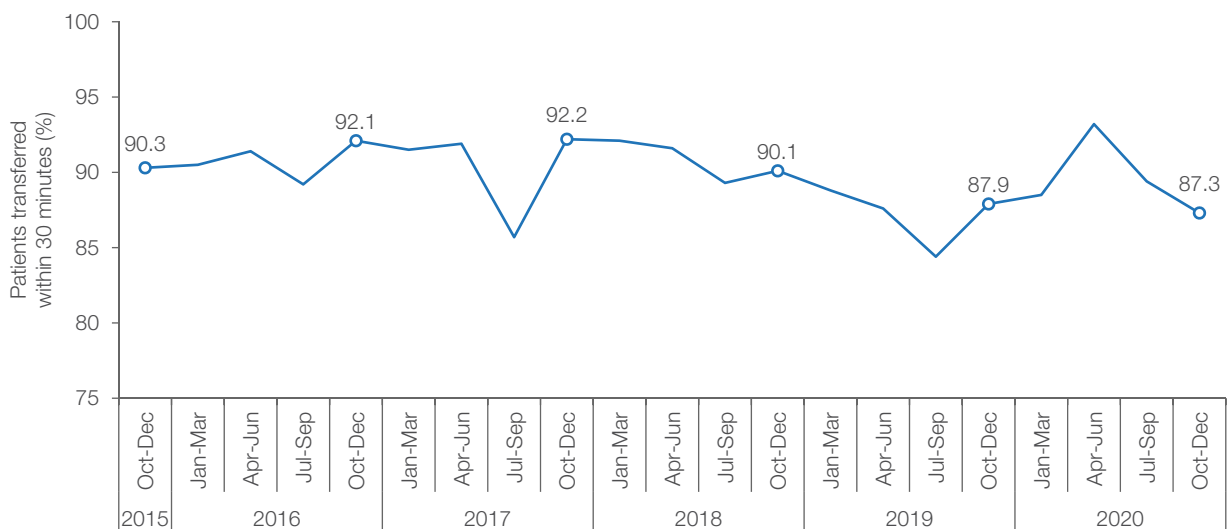


Figure 13 Median transfer of care time, October 2015 to December 2020

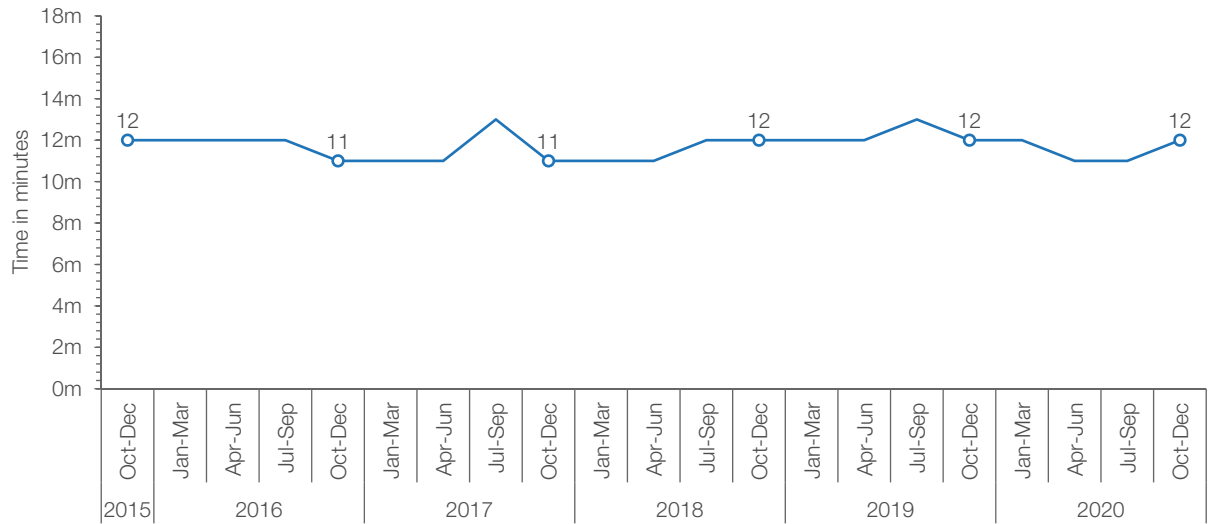
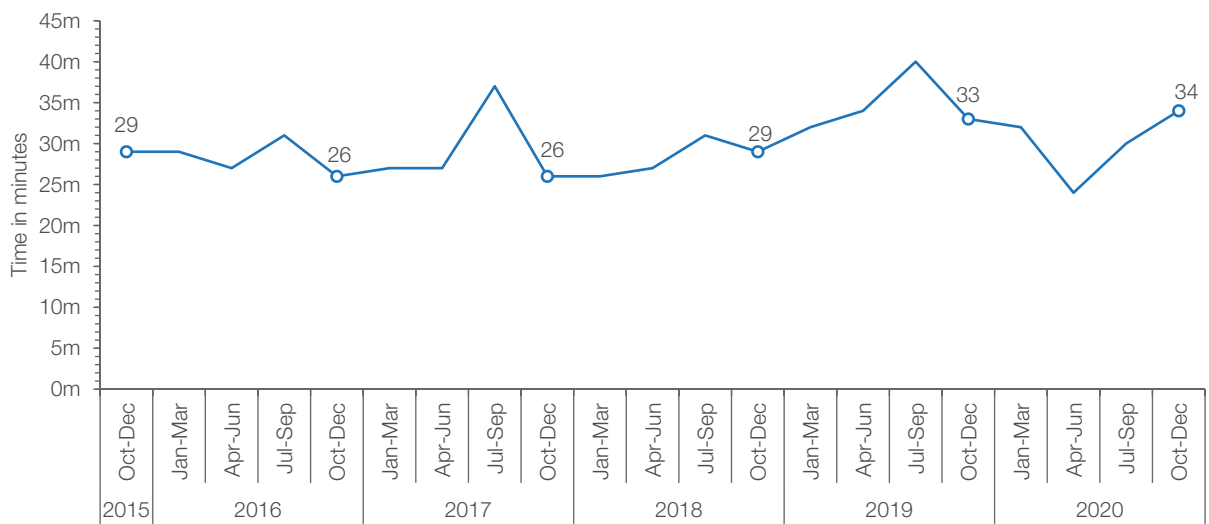


Figure 14 90th percentile transfer of care time, October 2015 to December 2020





Ambulance activity and performance

Ambulance activity

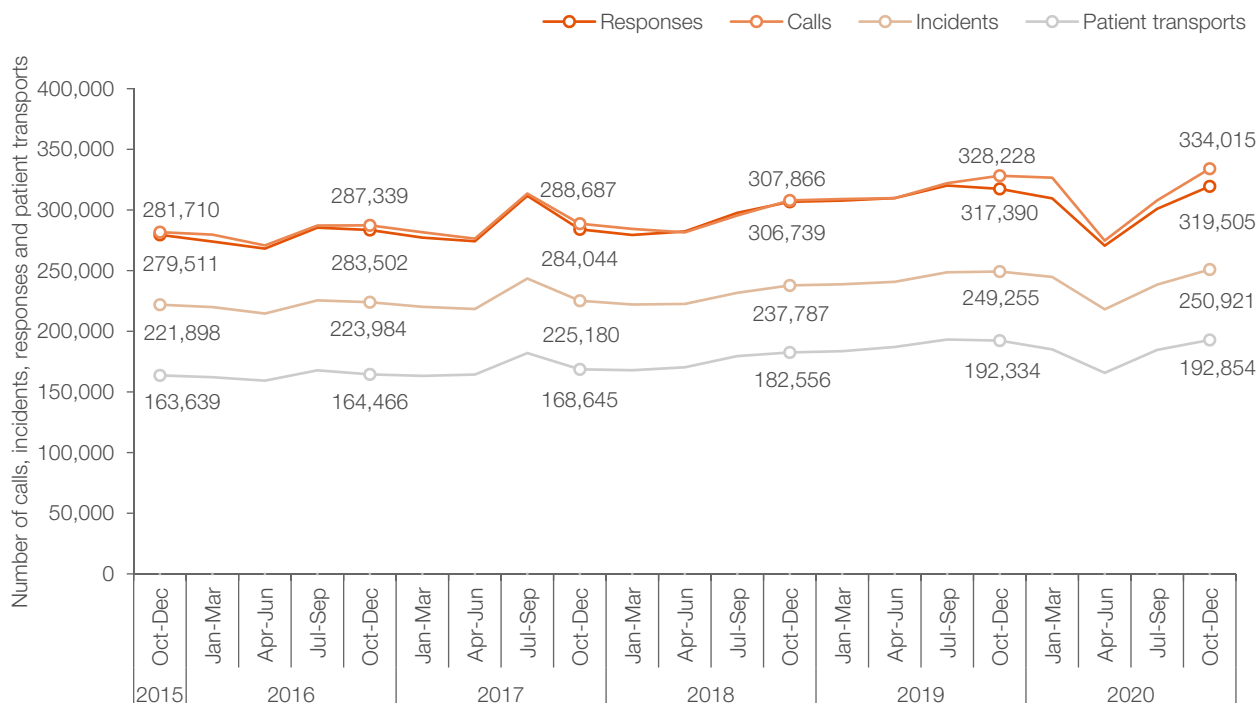
Activity is measured as the number of ambulance calls, incidents, responses and patient transports during the quarter. Ambulance activity is generally initiated by a Triple Zero (000) call. An incident is an event that results in a response by one or more ambulances. A response is the dispatch of an ambulance.

Depending on the seriousness of the incident, or the number of people involved, multiple responses (vehicles) may be required for a single incident. Most incidents have one vehicle assigned. Around two in 10 incidents have multiple vehicles assigned. Some vehicles are cancelled en route.

In October to December 2020, ambulance activity returned to levels similar to or slightly above those seen before the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of ambulance calls, incidents, responses and patient transports were the highest of any October to December quarter in the five-year period (Figures 15, 16).

For more information on ambulance activity and performance, see *Healthcare in Focus – New South Wales and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020* at bhi.nsw.gov.au

Figure 15 Ambulance calls, incidents, responses and patient transports, October 2015 to December 2020

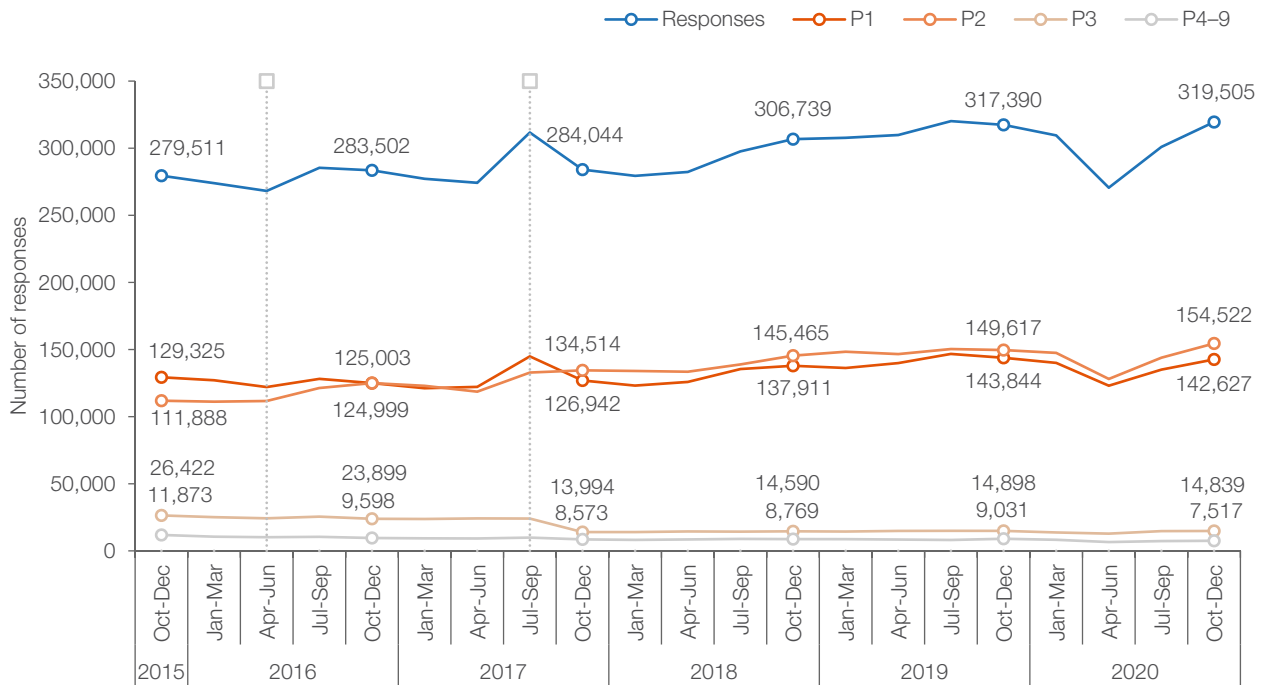


Ambulance responses by priority

There are nine main ambulance response priority categories. Three of these – priority 1 (P1: emergency), priority 2 (P2: urgent) and priority 3 (P3: time critical) – are commonly used to assess the timeliness of ambulance services. Within the priority 1 category, there is a sub-category of priority 1A (P1A) for life-threatening conditions (e.g. cardiac or respiratory arrest).

In October to December 2020, ambulance responses for P1 and P2 cases returned to levels similar to those seen before the COVID-19 pandemic. October to December 2020 had the highest number of P2 responses of any quarter in the five-year period (Figure 16).

Figure 16 Ambulance responses by priority category, October 2015 to December 2020



†: Changes to ambulance protocols resulting in the re-allocation of responses among priority categories.

Ambulance performance

Call to ambulance arrival time

Call to ambulance arrival time spans from when a call is first answered in the ambulance control centre (phone pick-up), to the time the first ambulance arrives at the scene (Figure 17). Two time benchmarks are considered for priority 1 (P1: emergency) and priority 2 (P2: urgent):

- the percentage of P1 call to ambulance arrival times within 15 and within 30 minutes
- the percentage of P2 call to ambulance arrival times within 30 and within 60 minutes.

October to December 2020 had the lowest percentage of call to ambulance arrival times within each of these benchmarks of any quarter in the five-year period (Figure 18).

Response time

In NSW, ambulance response time refers to the period from the placement of a Triple Zero (000) call 'in queue' for an ambulance dispatch until the first vehicle arrives at the scene.

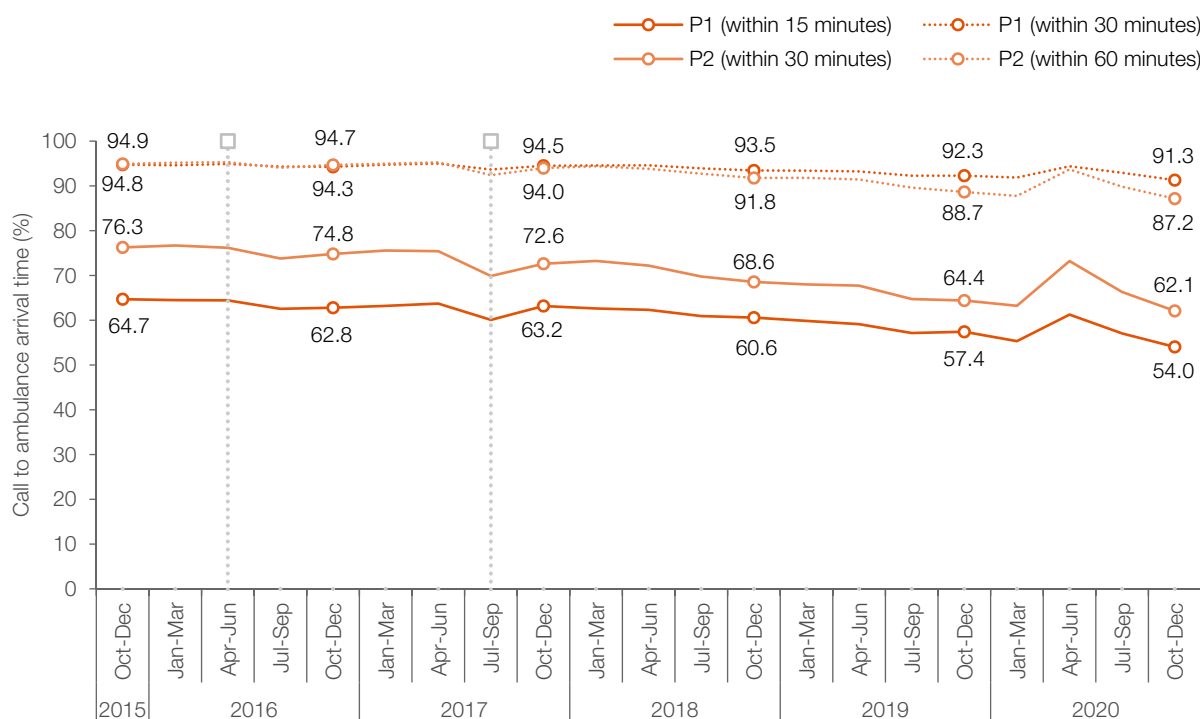
October to December 2020 had the longest median ambulance response times for P1 and P2 cases of any quarter in the five-year period (Figure 19).

The median ambulance response time for P1A cases increased slightly over five years (Figure 19). October to December 2020 had the lowest percentage of P1A response times within 10 minutes of any quarter in the five-year period (Figure 20).

Figure 17 Call to ambulance arrival time intervals, NSW



Figure 18 Percentage of call to ambulance arrival times, by priority category, October 2015 to December 2020



□: Changes to ambulance protocols resulting in the re-allocation of responses among priority categories.

Figure 19 Median ambulance response time by priority category, October 2015 to December 2020

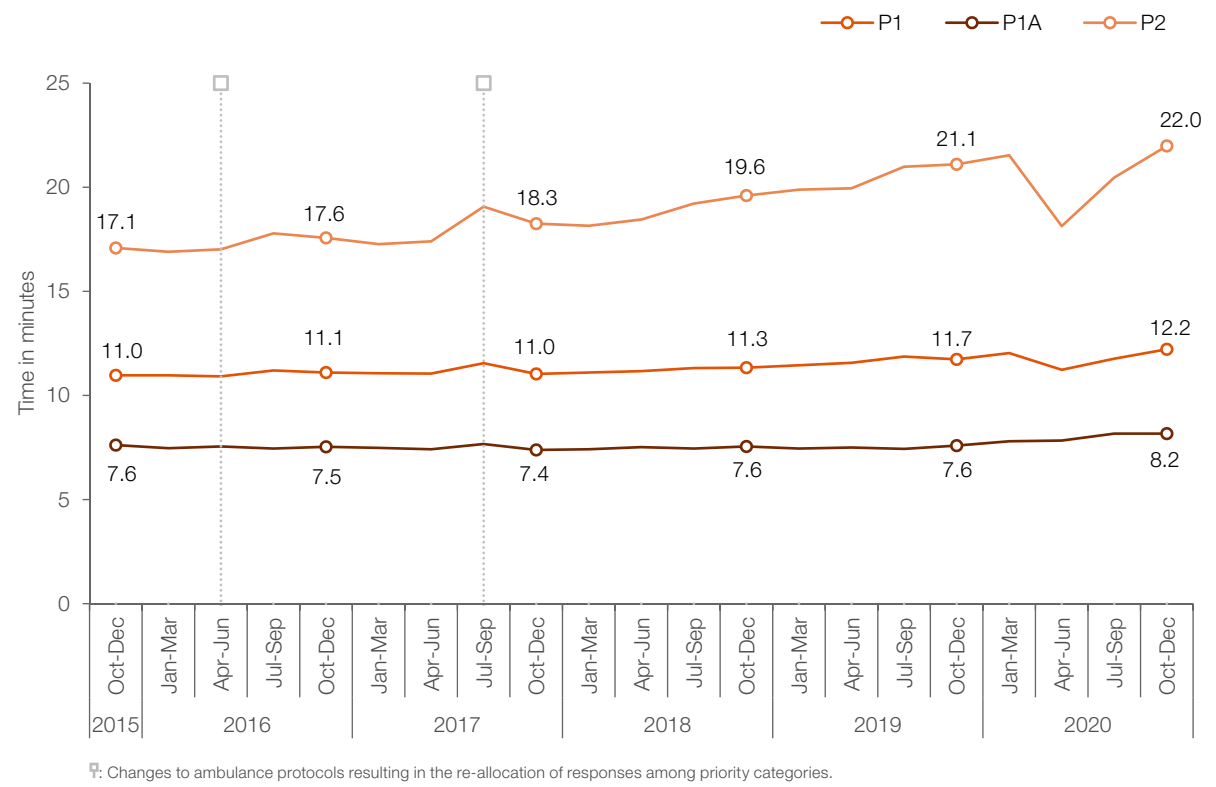
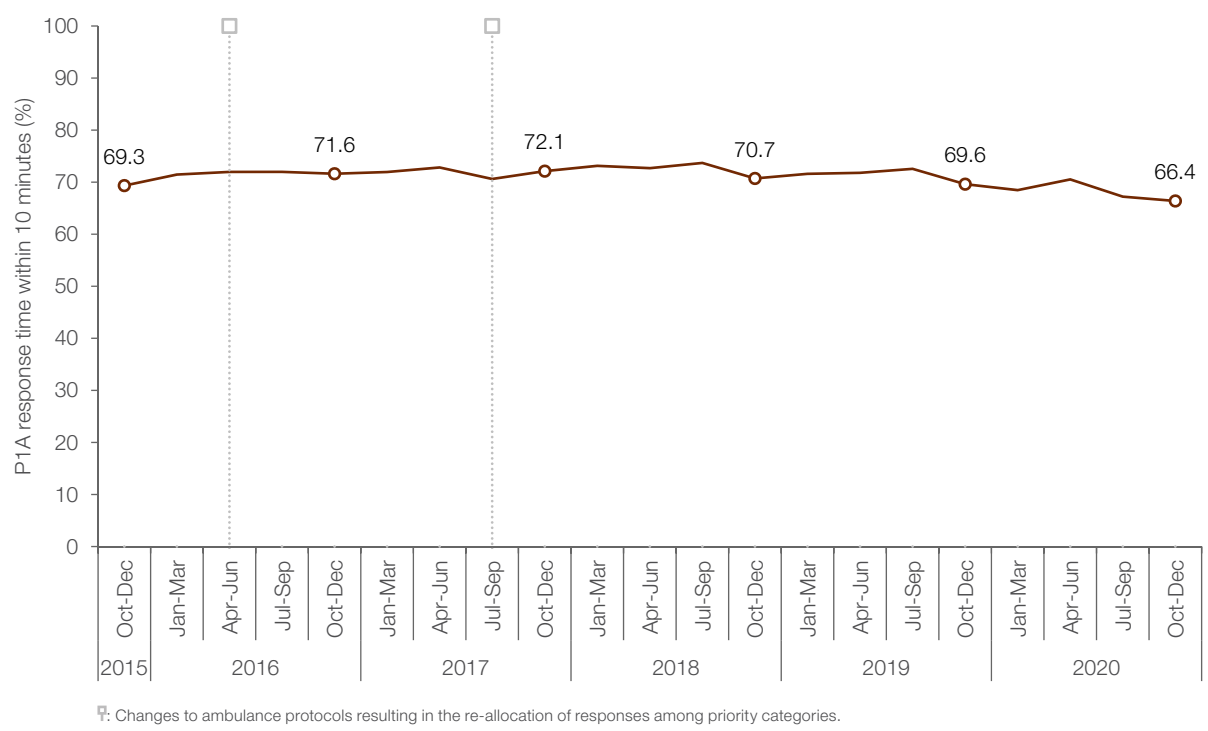


Figure 20 Percentage of priority 1A (P1A) response times within 10 minutes, October 2015 to December 2020





Admitted patient activity

Admitted patients

Admitted patient episodes can be acute (short-term admissions for immediate treatment) or non-acute (longer admissions for rehabilitation, palliative care or other reasons). Admissions that involve treatment for mental health can be acute or non-acute.

The five-year trend showed seasonal variation in hospital admissions, with both acute and non-acute episodes following a similar pattern.

In October to December 2020, the numbers of admitted patient episodes for all and acute admissions returned to levels similar to those seen before the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of acute admitted patient episodes was the highest of any October to December quarter in the five-year period.

The number of non-acute admitted patient episodes remained lower than pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels and was the lowest of any October to December quarter in the five-year period (Figure 21).

The number of mental health admitted patient episodes remained relatively stable over five years (Figure 21).

Admitted patient episodes can be for same-day or overnight care. October to December 2020 had the highest number of same-day acute episodes of any quarter in the five-year period (Figure 22).

For more information on admitted patient activity, see *Healthcare in Focus – New South Wales and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020* at bhi.nsw.gov.au

Figure 21 Total, acute, non-acute and mental health episodes, October 2015 to December 2020

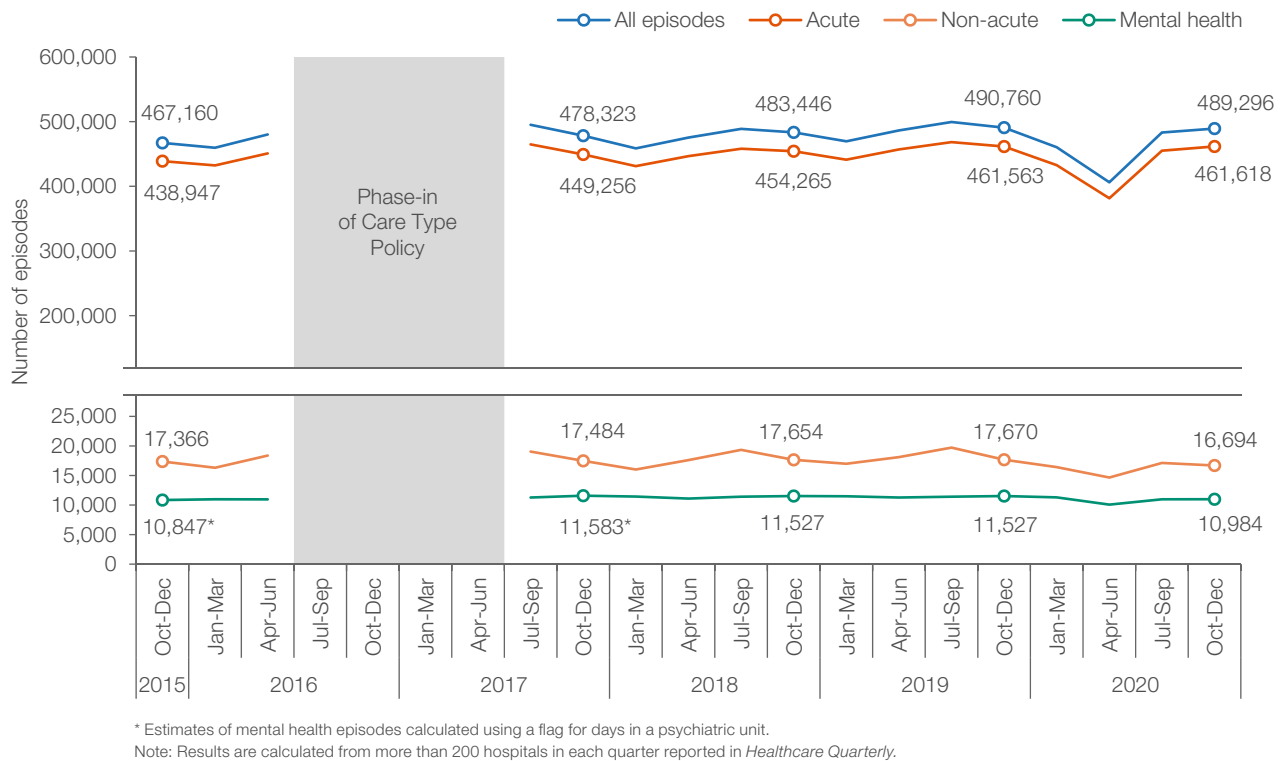
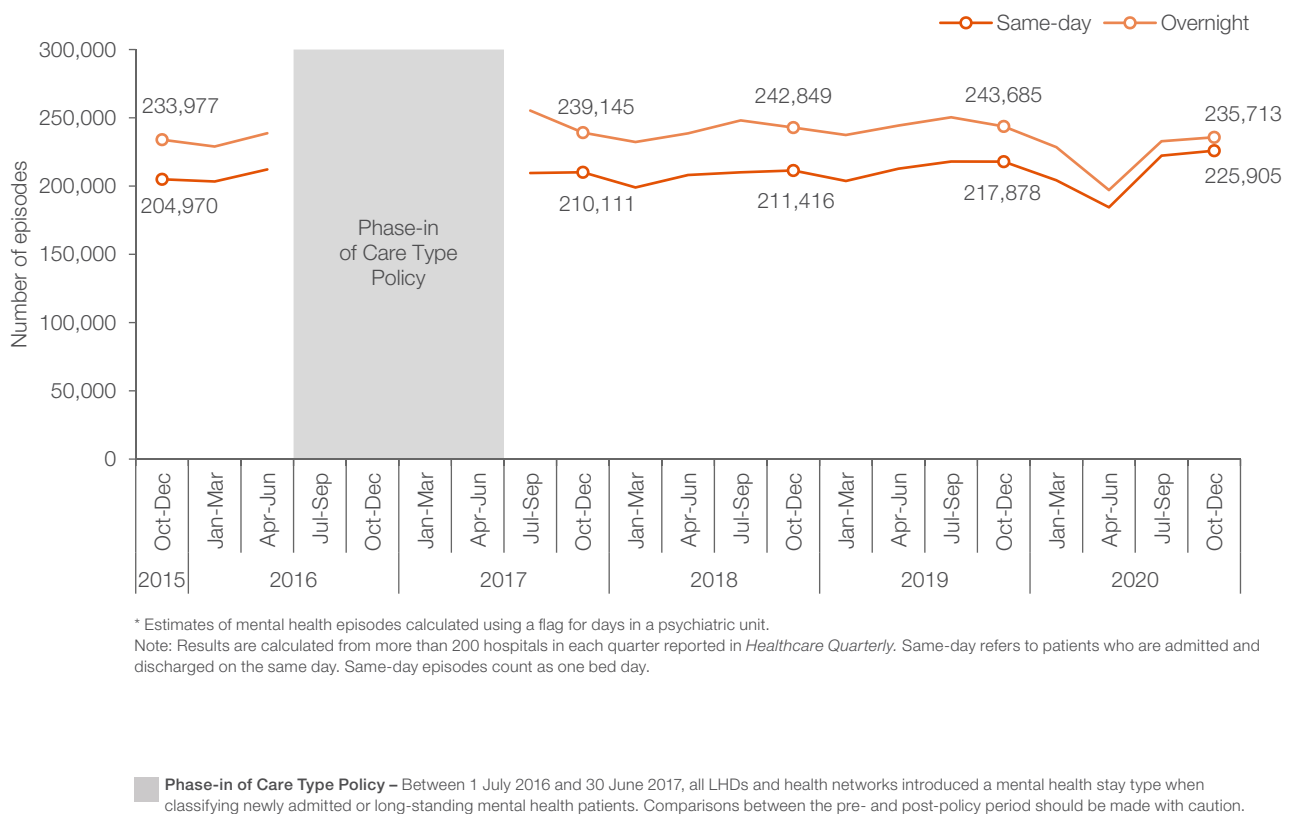


Figure 22 Overnight and same-day acute admitted patient episodes, October 2015 to December 2020



Hospital bed days for admitted patients

Bed days are used to establish levels of inpatient occupancy. A higher number of bed days suggests that either more patients are being hospitalised or that patients are hospitalised for longer periods, or both.

Total bed days for an overnight episode refers to the difference, in days, between the episode start and end dates, minus the number of episode leave days recorded. Same-day episodes count as one day.

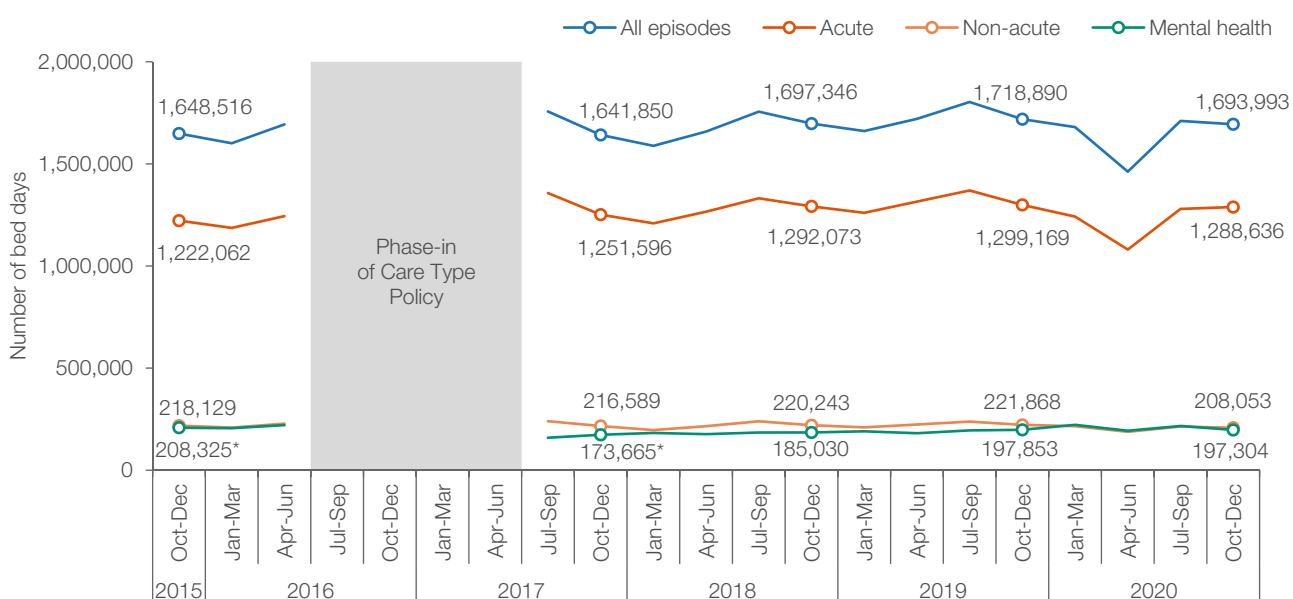
Seasonal variation for total bed days followed a similar variation pattern to that for admitted patient episodes (Figures 21, 23).

In October to December 2020, the numbers of hospital bed days for all episodes and acute episodes returned to levels similar to those seen before the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 23).

The number of hospital bed days for non-acute episodes remained slightly lower than pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels, the lowest of any October to December quarter in the five-year period (Figure 23).

Following the reclassification of mental health patients between 1 July 2016 and 30 June 2017, the number of hospital bed days for mental health episodes increased from 173,665 in October to December 2017 to 197,304 in October to December 2020, approaching levels before the Care Type Policy change (Figure 23).

Figure 23 Number of hospital bed days, by type of admitted patient episode, October 2015 to December 2020



* Estimates of mental health episodes calculated using a flag for days in a psychiatric unit.
 Note: Results are calculated from more than 200 hospitals in each quarter reported in *Healthcare Quarterly*.

Phase-in of Care Type Policy – Between 1 July 2016 and 30 June 2017, all LHDs and health networks introduced a mental health stay type when classifying newly admitted or long-standing mental health patients. Comparisons between the pre- and post-policy period should be made with caution.

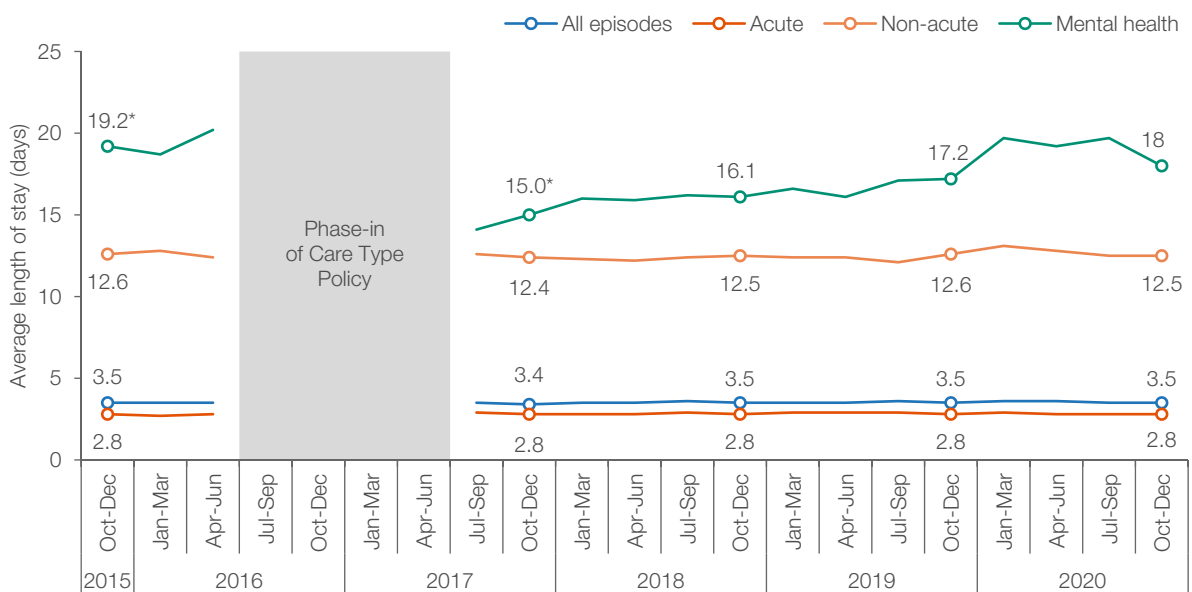
Average length of stay in hospital

The average length of stay refers to the mean of total bed days for all acute, non-acute or mental health admitted patient episodes.

The average length of stay was steady for all episodes, acute episodes and non-acute episodes over five years (Figure 24).

Following the reclassification of mental health patients between 1 July 2016 and 30 June 2017, the average length of stay has increased for mental health admitted patient episodes from 15.0 days in October to December 2017 to 18.0 days in October to December 2020, approaching levels before the Care Type Policy change (Figure 24).

Figure 24 Average length of stay, by type of admitted patient episode, October 2015 to December 2020



* Estimates of mental health episodes calculated using a flag for days in a psychiatric unit.
 Note: Results are calculated from more than 200 hospitals in each quarter reported in *Healthcare Quarterly*.

Phase-in of Care Type Policy – Between 1 July 2016 and 30 June 2017, all LHDs and health networks introduced a mental health stay type when classifying newly admitted or long-standing mental health patients. Comparisons between the pre- and post-policy period should be made with caution.



Seclusion and restraint

Seclusion events and rate

A seclusion event occurs when a patient is placed alone in a room or an area with no freedom of exit. Seclusion is not therapeutic and should only be used as a last resort when other options are unsuccessful in maintaining safety for the patient, staff or others.

The NSW Ministry of Health introduced a new key performance indicator (KPI) for seclusion for 2020–21. The target for the percentage of acute mental health episodes of care with at least one seclusion event is less than 4.1% for each hospital.

There are 46 public hospitals with specialised acute mental health units in NSW including six with a Mental Health Intensive Care Unit (MHICU).

Across October to December quarters, the percentage of acute mental health episodes of care in NSW with at least one seclusion event decreased from 5.3% in 2015 to 3.3% in 2019, then rose slightly to 3.6% in 2020 (Figure 25).

The percentage of acute mental health episodes of care with at least one seclusion event in hospitals with

a MHICU followed a similar pattern, and was typically higher than in hospitals without a MHICU (Figure 25).

Across October to December quarters, the number of seclusion events decreased from 1,201 in 2015 to 774 in 2020, down 35.6% (427). The number of seclusion events in hospitals with a MHICU decreased from 562 in October to December 2015 to 386 in October to December 2020, down 31.3% (176) (Figure 26).

The rate of seclusion is the number of seclusion events per 1,000 bed days. Across October to December quarters, the rate decreased from 9.3 per 1,000 bed days in 2015 to 6.0 per 1,000 in 2020. Similarly, the rate of seclusion in hospitals with a MHICU also declined over five years, and was typically higher than in hospitals without a MHICU (Figure 27).

Since 2018–19, the NSW Ministry of Health's KPI target for the rate of seclusion has been less than 5.1 per 1,000 bed days. The rate of seclusion at NSW level has been above 5.1 per 1,000 bed days since the April to June 2019 quarter (Figure 27).

Figure 25 Percentage of acute mental health episodes of care occurring in specialised acute mental health inpatient units with at least one seclusion event, October 2015 to December 2020

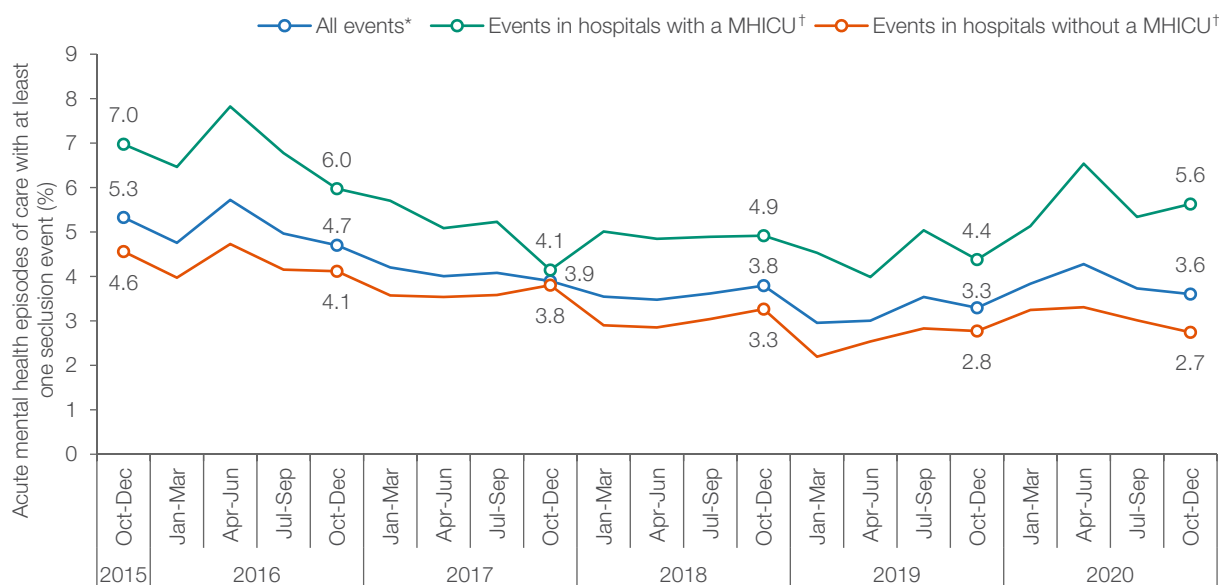


Figure 26 Number of seclusion events occurring in specialised acute mental health inpatient units, October 2015 to December 2020

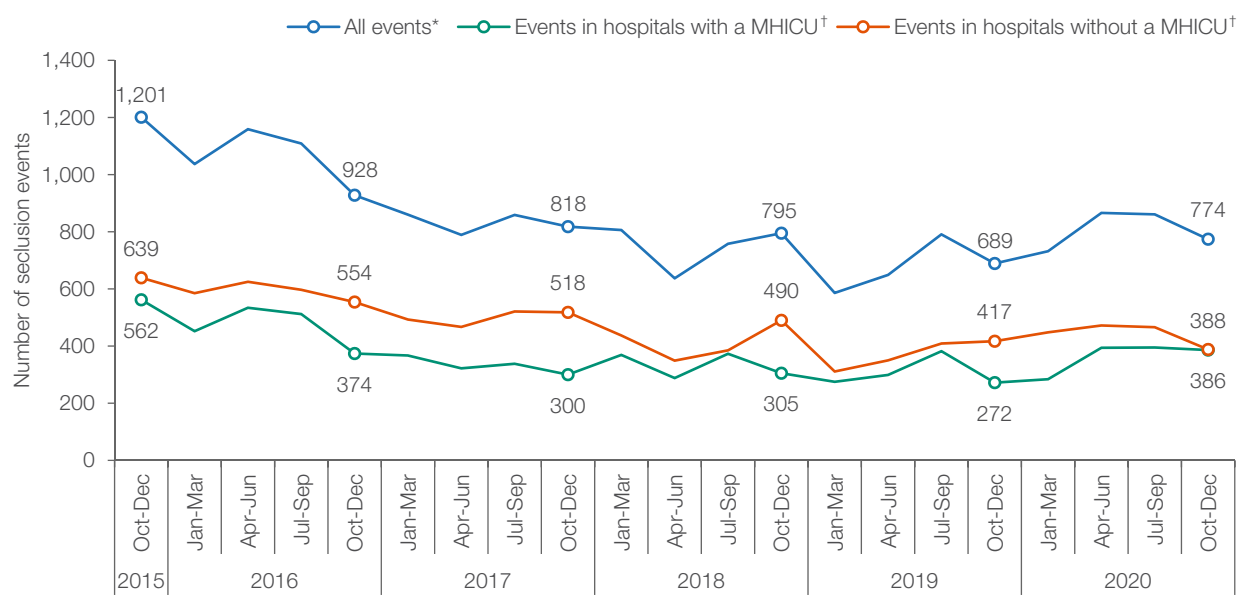
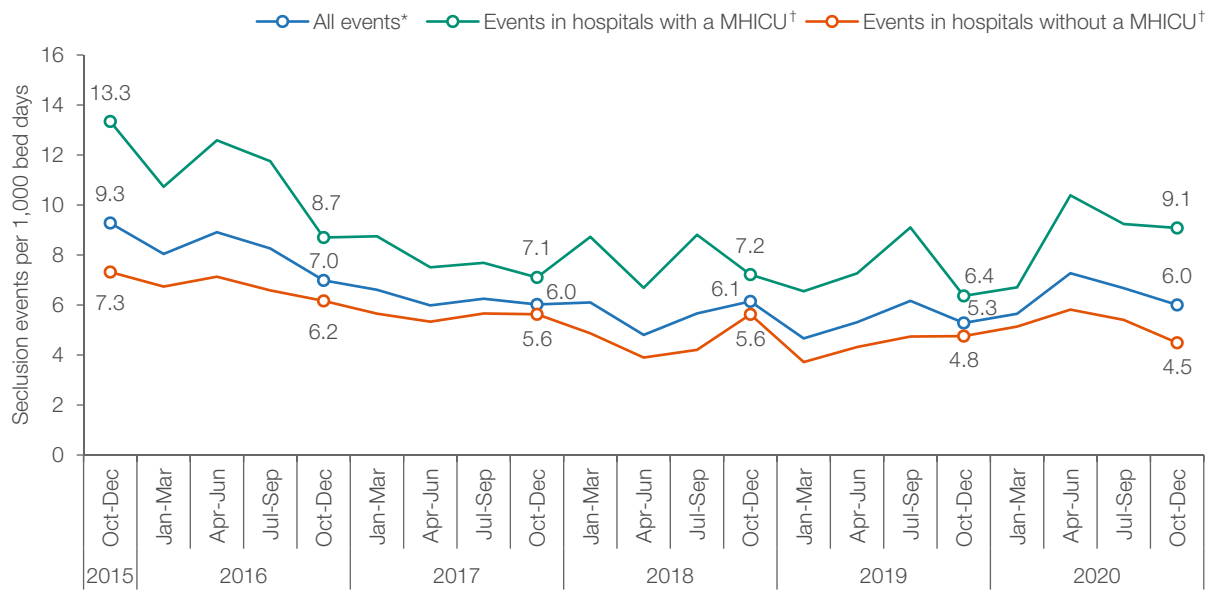


Figure 27 Number of seclusion events per 1,000 bed days in specialised acute mental health inpatient units, October 2015 to December 2020



* 'All events' includes all seclusion events occurring in specialised acute mental health inpatient units, excluding episodes in the Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network (JHFMHN).
 † MHICU = Mental Health Intensive Care Unit
 Note: For more information, including which hospitals are included each quarter, please refer to the technical supplement to this report and *Measurement Matters – Reporting on seclusion and restraint in NSW public hospitals*, which are available at bhi.nsw.gov.au

Restraint events and rate

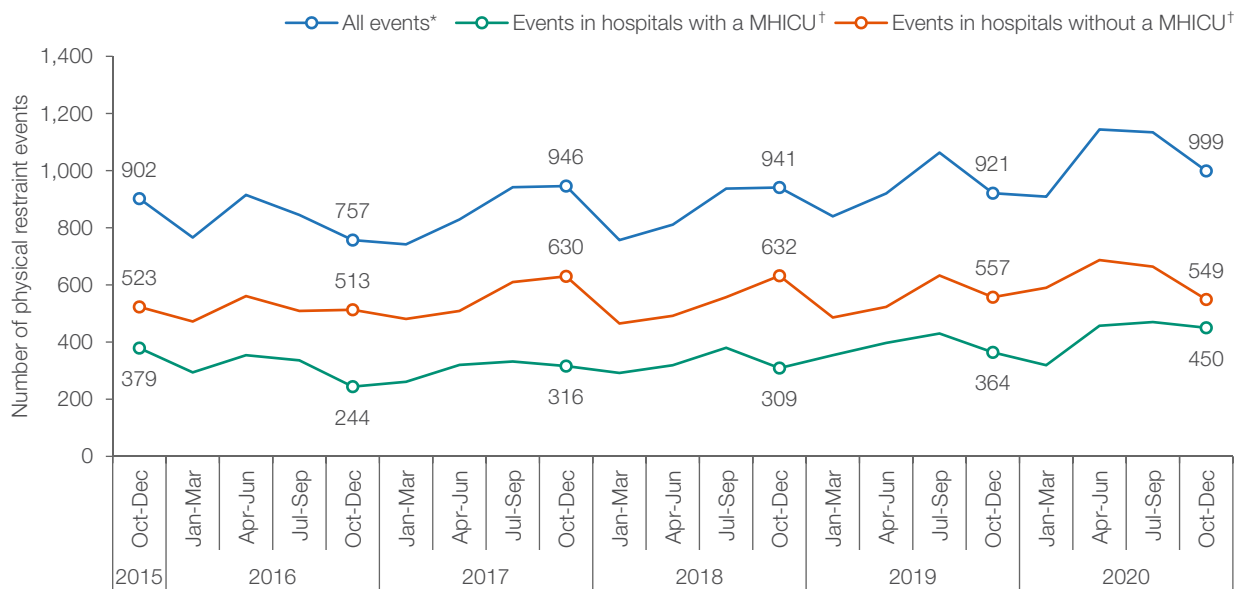
A physical restraint event occurs when the patient's freedom of movement is restricted by physical means (i.e. hands-on immobilisation by healthcare staff). Such restrictive intervention is not therapeutic and should only be used as a last resort when other options have been unsuccessful in maintaining safety for the patient, staff or others.

Most episodes of care in acute mental health units in NSW public hospitals do not have a physical restraint event. In October to December 2020, 95.6% of acute mental health episodes of care did not have any physical restraint event (data not shown).

The number of physical restraint events showed some seasonal variation over five years and increased slightly from 902 in October to December 2015 to 999 in October to December 2020, up 10.8% (97) (Figure 28).

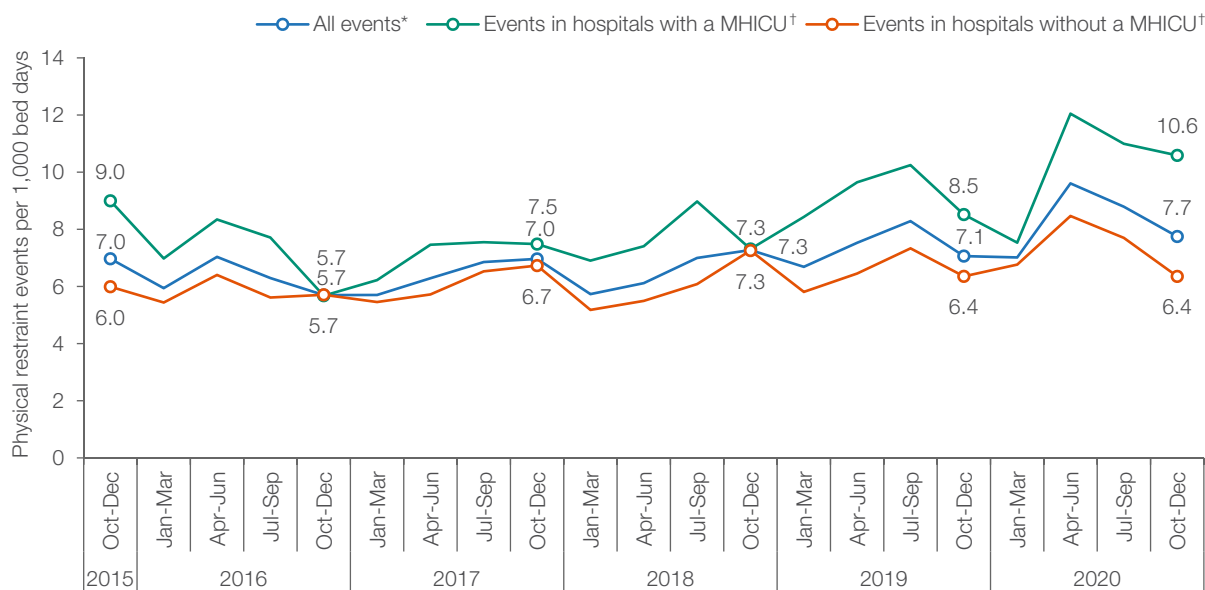
The rate of restraint refers to the number of restraint events per 1,000 bed days. The rate of physical restraint increased from 7.0 per 1,000 bed days in October to December 2015 to 7.7 per 1,000 bed days in October to December 2020. Similarly, the rate of physical restraint in hospitals with a MHICU also increased over five years, and was typically higher than in hospitals without a MHICU (Figure 29).

Figure 28 Number of physical restraint events occurring in specialised acute mental health inpatient units, October 2015 to December 2020



Note: Data collection for physical restraint commenced in 2015–16. The variation in the number of physical restraint events over time may be due to differences in the processes for manual collection of data and/or a maturing understanding of the definition of physical restraint rather than actual differences in the use of physical restraint.

Figure 29 Number of physical restraint events per 1,000 bed days in specialised acute mental health inpatient units, October 2015 to December 2020



* 'All events' includes all physical restraint events occurring in specialised acute mental health inpatient units, excluding episodes in the JHFMHN.

† MHICU = Mental Health Intensive Care Unit

Note: For more information, including which hospitals are included each quarter, please refer to the technical supplement to this report and *Measurement Matters – Reporting on seclusion and restraint in NSW public hospitals*, which are available at bhi.nsw.gov.au

Seclusion and restraint duration

While seclusion and restraint are used to maintain safety for a patient, staff or others, the length of time that an individual is exposed to these restrictive interventions should be as short as possible.

When examining average duration of seclusion and restraint events, it should be noted that variation can be affected by a single event lasting considerably longer than others. NSW Health identifies improvement in the use of restrictive practices as a reduction in the number and duration of seclusion and restraint events, without substitution of other forms of restrictive practices.

The average duration of a seclusion event increased from 5 hours and 9 minutes in October to December 2015 to 7 hours 10 minutes in October to December 2020. The average duration of a seclusion event in hospitals with a MHICU also increased over five years, and was typically longer than in hospitals without a MHICU (Figure 30).

The NSW Health KPI target for seclusion duration has been less than four hours since 2017–18. The average duration of a seclusion event at NSW level has been longer than four hours since October to December 2015 (Figure 30).

The average duration of physical restraint events varied between 4 minutes 4 seconds, and 5 minutes 47 seconds over five years. The average duration of a physical restraint event in hospitals with a MHICU was typically longer than in hospitals without a MHICU (Figure 31).

In *Healthcare Quarterly*, BHI reports on facilities with specialised declared acute mental health units and specialised non-declared acute mental health units, with both voluntary and involuntary episodes of care included. BHI does not report on seclusion and restraint in non-acute specialised mental health inpatient units or in emergency departments. The Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network (JHFMHN) treats a different type of consumer and has different models of care. Therefore, JHFMHN is not included in NSW totals in this report.

Figure 30 Average duration of seclusion events occurring in specialised acute mental health inpatient units, October 2015 to December 2020

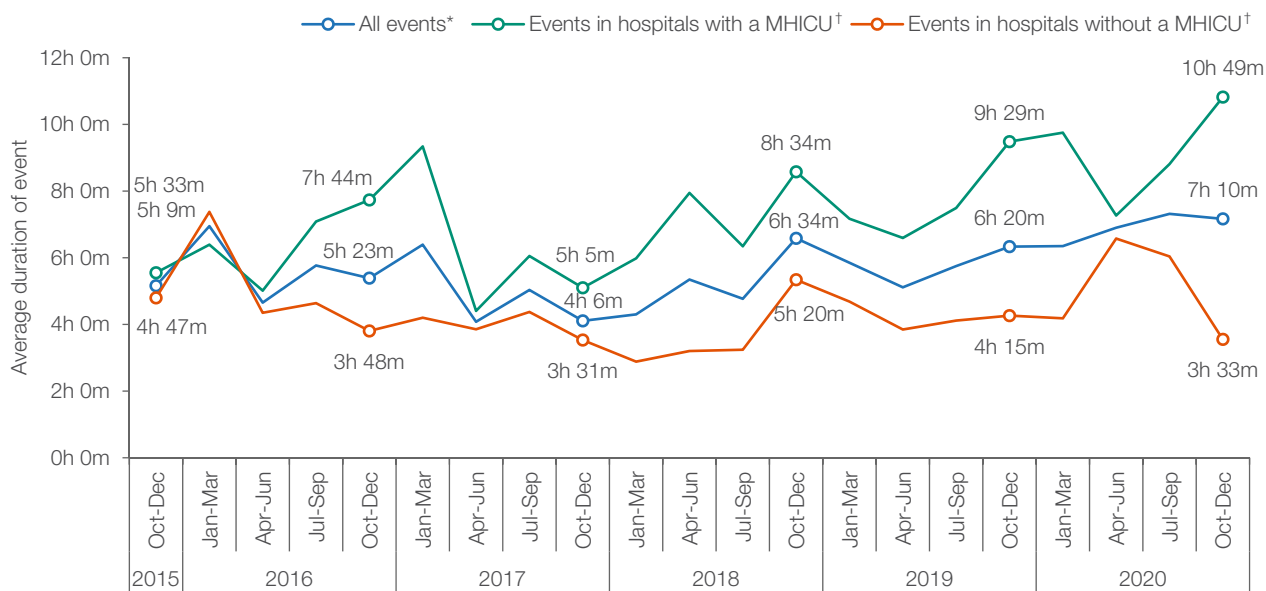
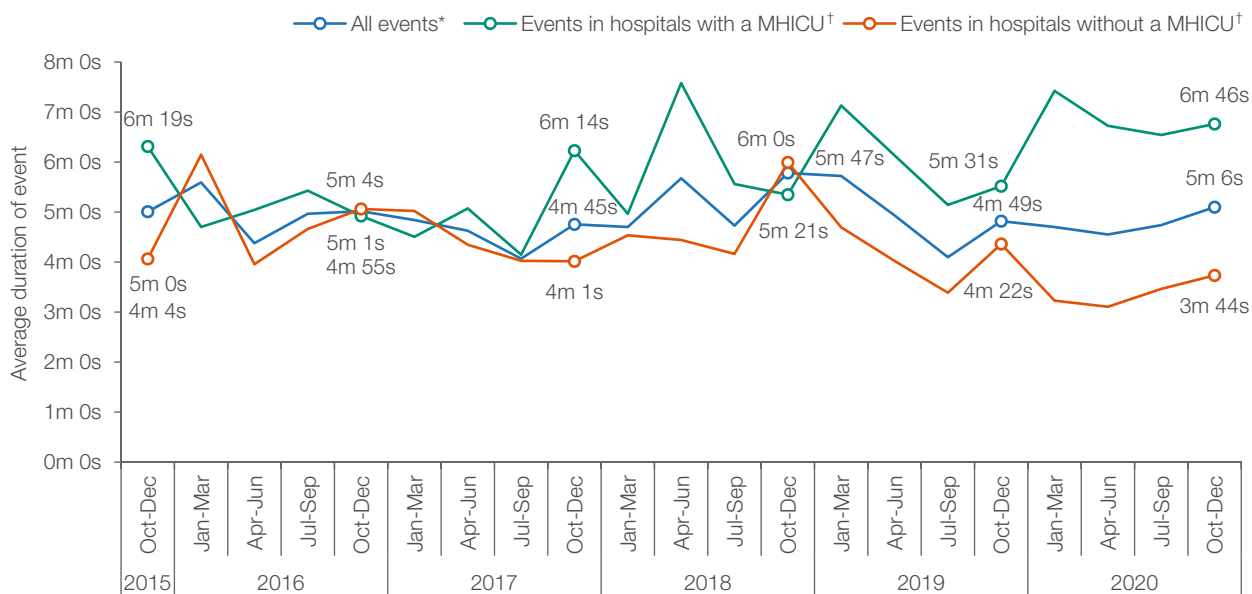


Figure 31 Average duration of physical restraint events occurring in specialised acute mental health inpatient units, October 2015 to December 2020



* 'All events' includes all seclusion or physical restraint events occurring in specialised acute mental health inpatient units, excluding episodes in the JHFMHN.
 † MHICU = Mental Health Intensive Care Unit
 Note: For more information, including which hospitals are included each quarter, please refer to the technical supplement to this report and *Measurement Matters – Reporting on seclusion and restraint in NSW public hospitals*, which are available at bhi.nsw.gov.au



Elective surgery activity and performance

Elective surgery

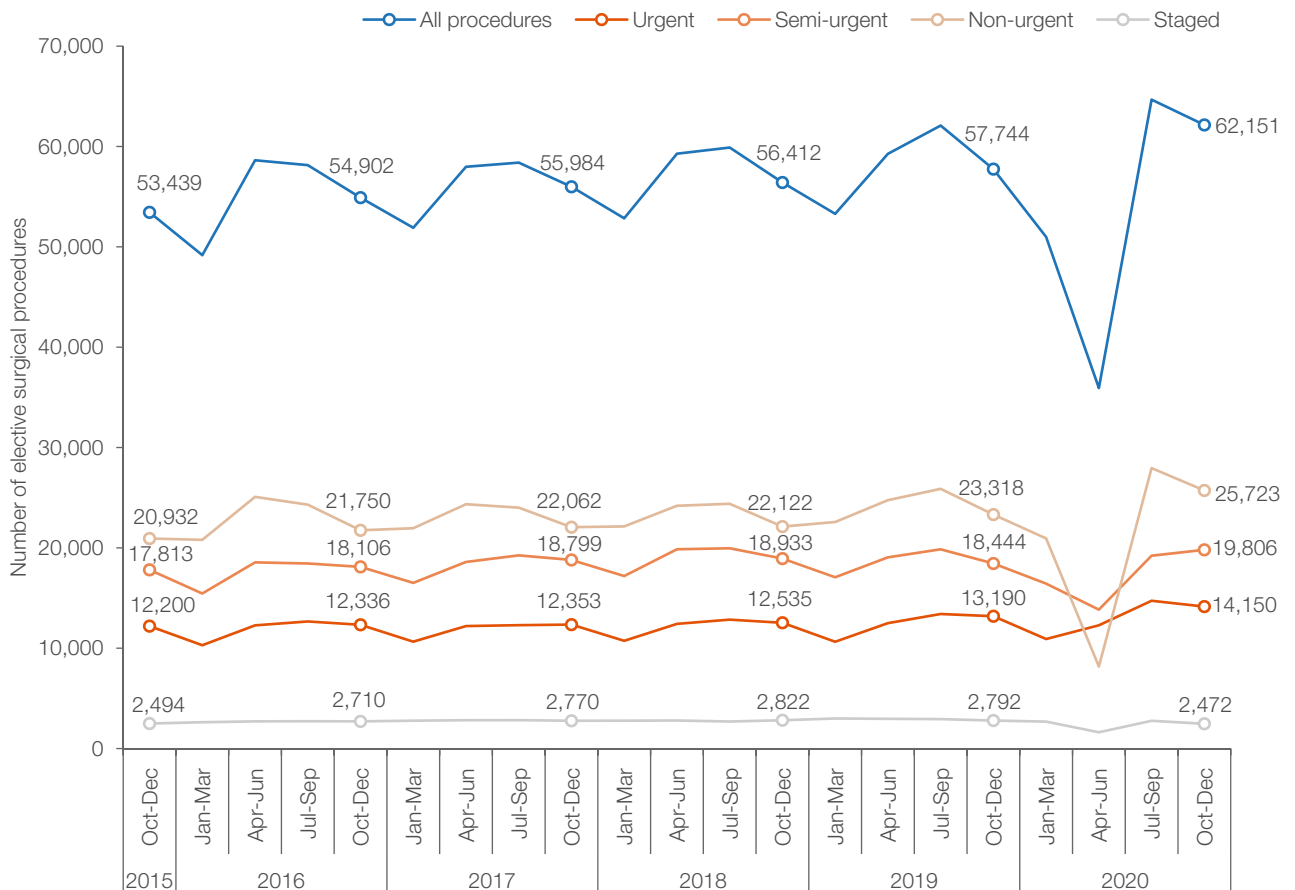
There are three main urgency categories for elective surgery: urgent, semi-urgent and non-urgent. Staged procedures, for medical reasons, cannot be performed before a certain amount of time has passed. The urgency category is determined by the surgeon and is based on clinical criteria. The surgeon also decides whether a change in the patient's condition warrants a shift to a different urgency category.

In July to September 2020, the number of elective surgical procedures performed increased following the resumption of non-urgent surgery, which had been suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

October to December 2020 had the highest number of procedures performed in every urgency category of any October to December quarter in the five-year period (Figure 31).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, from 26 March 2020, National Cabinet suspended all non-urgent elective surgery. From 27 April, additional elective surgery up to 25% of normal levels was permitted, and from 15 May, three stages for reopening elective surgery were established, to be implemented at the discretion of each jurisdiction.

Figure 32 Elective surgical procedures performed, by urgency category, October 2015 to December 2020



Note: From 26 March 2020, National Cabinet suspended all non-urgent elective surgery. From 27 April, additional elective surgery up to 25% of normal levels was permitted, and from 15 May, three stages for reopening elective surgery were established, to be implemented at the discretion of each jurisdiction.

Percentage of elective surgery on time

For each urgency category there are clinically recommended time frames within which elective surgical procedures should be performed: 30 days for urgent surgery, 90 days for semi-urgent surgery, and 365 days for non-urgent surgery.

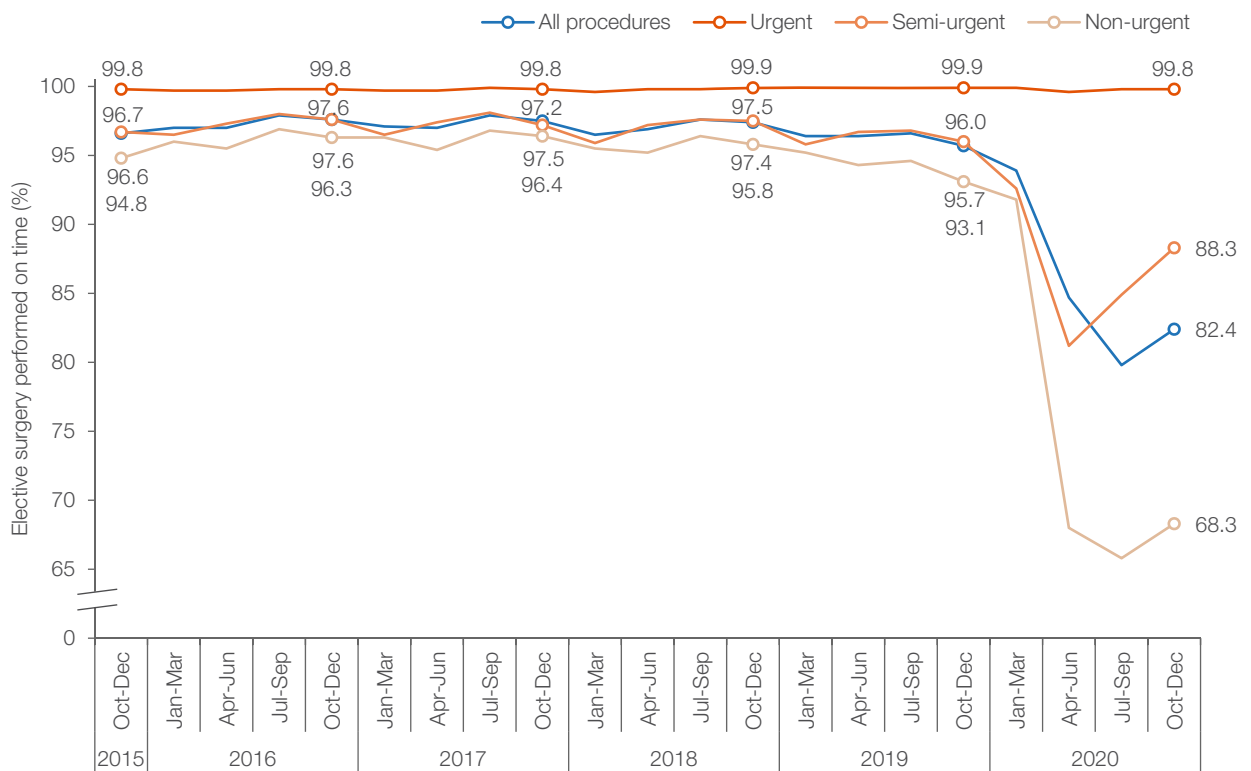
Almost all urgent elective surgical procedures were consistently performed within the clinically recommended time frame over five years (Figure 33).

Following a sharp decrease in April to June 2020, the percentage of procedures performed on time for semi-urgent elective surgery continued to increase to 88.3% in October to December 2020 (Figure 33).

For non-urgent elective surgery, the percentage of procedures performed on time increased in October to December 2020 from its lowest level in July to September 2020 (Figure 33).

For more information on elective surgery activity and performance, see *Healthcare in Focus – New South Wales and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020* at bhi.nsw.gov.au

Figure 33 Percentage of elective surgical procedures performed on time, by urgency category, October 2015 to December 2020



Note: From 26 March 2020, National Cabinet suspended all non-urgent elective surgery. From 27 April, additional elective surgery up to 25% of normal levels was permitted, and from 15 May, three stages for reopening elective surgery were established, to be implemented at the discretion of each jurisdiction.

Waiting time and waiting list for elective surgery

The waiting time for elective surgical procedures is measured as the number of days from when a patient was placed on the list to when they received surgery.

Median waiting time

The median waiting time refers to the number of days it took for half of the patients to be admitted to hospital and undergo surgery. The other half waited the same amount of time or longer.

The median waiting time remained relatively stable for urgent procedures over five years. The median waiting time for semi-urgent procedures increased slightly to 51 days in October to December 2020 – the longest of any quarter in the five-year period. The median waiting time for non-urgent procedures decreased in October to December 2020 from its highest level in July to September 2020 (Figure 34).

90th percentile waiting time

The 90th percentile gives a sense of the longest waiting times to receive surgery. This measure indicates the number of days it took for 90% of

patients to undergo surgery. The waiting time for the remaining 10% was the same or longer.

The 90th percentile waiting time for semi-urgent and non-urgent elective surgery decreased slightly in October to December 2020 from its highest level (Figure 35).

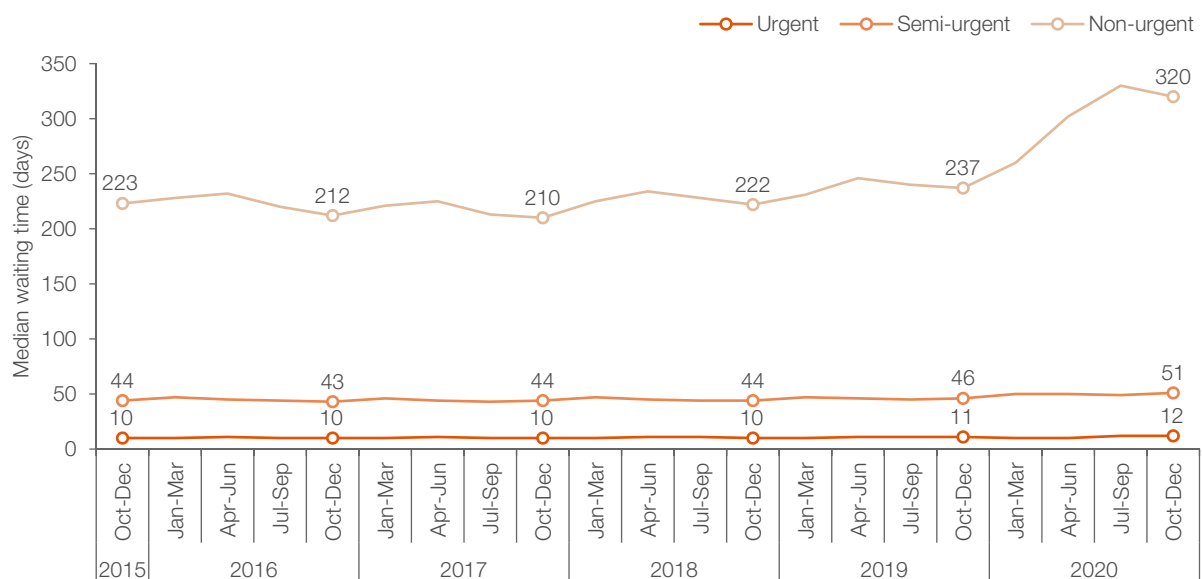
Waiting list

The waiting list is dynamic and information about the number of patients still waiting for surgery is a snapshot of the list on a single day. In this case, it is the number of patients who were ready for surgery on the last day of the quarter.

In October to December 2020, the number of patients on the waiting list for urgent and semi-urgent procedures decreased from its highest level in July to September 2020 (Figure 36).

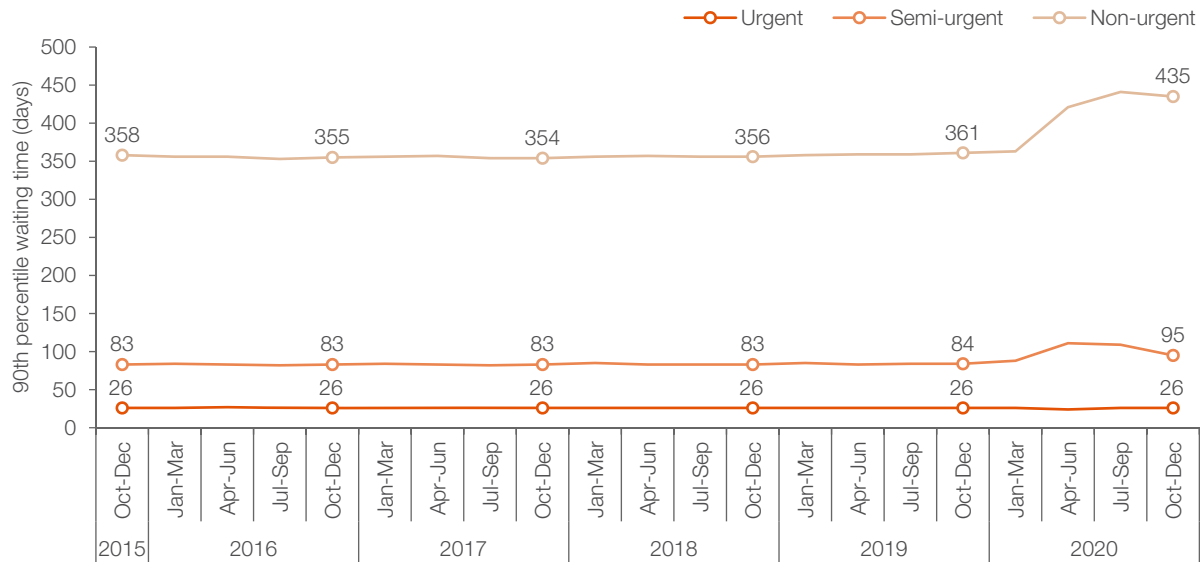
The number of patients on the waiting list for non-urgent procedures peaked in April to June 2020, and then decreased to 74,170 in October to December 2020, returning to levels similar to those seen before the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 36).

Figure 34 Median waiting time for elective surgery, by urgency category, October 2015 to December 2020



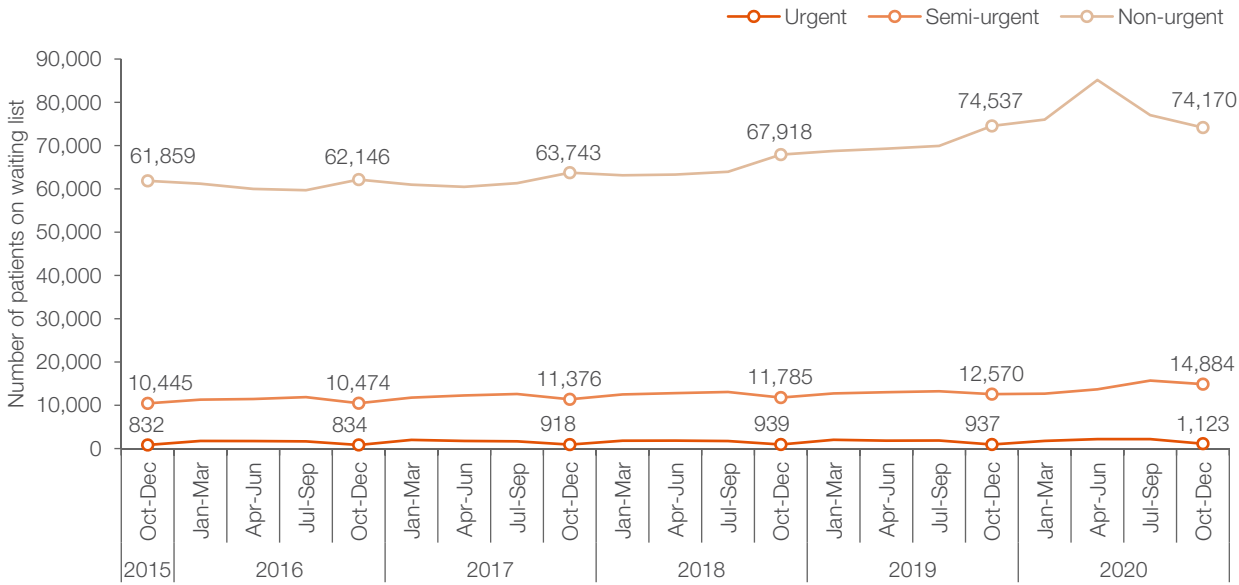
Note: From 26 March 2020, National Cabinet suspended all non-urgent elective surgery. From 27 April, additional elective surgery up to 25% of normal levels was permitted, and from 15 May, three stages for reopening elective surgery were established, to be implemented at the discretion of each jurisdiction.

Figure 35 90th percentile waiting time for elective surgery, by urgency category, October 2015 to December 2020



Note: From 26 March 2020, National Cabinet suspended all non-urgent elective surgery. From 27 April, additional elective surgery up to 25% of normal levels was permitted, and from 15 May, three stages for reopening elective surgery were established, to be implemented at the discretion of each jurisdiction.

Figure 36 Patients on the waiting list for elective surgery at the end of the quarter, by urgency category, October 2015 to December 2020



Note: From 26 March 2020, National Cabinet suspended all non-urgent elective surgery. From 27 April, additional elective surgery up to 25% of normal levels was permitted, and from 15 May, three stages for reopening elective surgery were established, to be implemented at the discretion of each jurisdiction.



About the Bureau of Health Information

The Bureau of Health Information (BHI) is a board-governed organisation that provides independent information about the performance of the NSW healthcare system.

BHI was established in 2009 and supports the accountability of the healthcare system by providing regular and detailed information to the community, government and healthcare professionals. This in turn supports quality improvement by highlighting how well the healthcare system is functioning and where there are opportunities to improve.

BHI manages the NSW Patient Survey Program, gathering information from patients about their experiences and outcomes of care in public hospitals and other healthcare facilities.

BHI publishes a range of reports and information products, including interactive tools, that provide objective, accurate and meaningful information about how the health system is performing.

BHI's work relies on the efforts of a wide range of healthcare, data and policy experts. All of our assessment efforts leverage the work of hospital coders, analysts, technicians and healthcare providers who gather, codify and supply data. Our public reporting of performance information is enabled and enhanced by the infrastructure, expertise and stewardship provided by colleagues from NSW Health and its pillar organisations.

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