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## Rise in elective surgery activity following COVID-19 suspension

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 July to September 2020.

It includes a COVID-19 supplement which focuses on activity at NSW level from January to September 2020, providing greater insights into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the healthcare system.

BHI Chief Executive Dr Diane Watson said the report reveals public hospital and ambulance activity was well above April to June levels as COVID-19 cases remained low in the State. This included a resurgence in the number of elective surgical procedures performed as activity continued to increase following the suspension of non-urgent procedures in March.

### Elective surgery

The number of elective surgical procedures performed in NSW during July to September 2020 was 64,668, up 2,581 (4.2%) compared with the same quarter the previous year.

“More elective surgical procedures were performed in the July to September 2020 quarter than in any quarter over the past five years, approaching double the number performed in April to June 2020,” Dr Watson said.

“However, more people were on the waiting list for surgery at the end of the quarter compared with the same time last year, and those people were more likely to have waited longer – although both measures decreased notably from the record peaks seen at the end of June 2020.”

The number of people on the waiting list on 30 September 2020 was up 10,024 (11.8%) to 95,052, compared with the same quarter last year. Of those people, 8,193 had waited longer than the clinically recommended time for their surgery, up from 844 in 2019.

The percentage of procedures performed within clinically recommended time frames during July to September 2020 was down 16.8 percentage points to 79.8%, although almost all urgent procedures (99.8%) were performed on time.

### Emergency departments

There were 711,422 emergency department (ED) attendances in the July to September 2020 quarter, down 53,150 (7.0%) compared with the same quarter in 2019. The most striking decreases from 2019 were in the urgent (triage 3) and semi-urgent (triage 4) categories, down 11.9% and 16.3%, respectively.

“After the sharp drop in late March, weekly ED attendances increased steadily and came gradually closer to 2019 levels during the July to September quarter,” Dr Watson said. “By the last week of September, there were 55,745 attendances, down just 4.6% compared with the same week in 2019.”

Non-urgent (triage 5) presentations remained at higher levels than 2019 – up by 27,797 (43.2%), compared with the same time last year.

“The increase in non-urgent presentations over this period is primarily due to COVID-19 testing provided by EDs, even though most COVID-19 testing moved to separate dedicated testing clinics from late March,” Dr Watson said.

Overall, patients tended to start their treatment sooner and spend less time in the ED. In July to September 2020, 78.9% of ED patients in NSW were treated on time (up 8.6 percentage points) and 71.5% of these patients left the ED within four hours of arrival (up 3.4 percentage points).

BHI has also today released the results of the **Maternity Care Survey 2019**. They show what almost 4,500 women who gave birth in one of 68 NSW public hospitals in 2019 had to say about their experiences of care, including which aspects of their care were provided particularly well and where there was room for improvement.

“Most women (94%) told us the care they received during labour and birth was very good (76%) or good (18%),” Dr Watson said.

“However, fewer than six in 10 women (58%) said health professionals completely discussed their worries and fears with them at antenatal check-ups, down from 64% in 2017.”

The Snapshot report also highlights key NSW-level findings for the 283 Aboriginal women who responded to the survey.

Detailed results from *Healthcare Quarterly* and the Maternity Care Survey 2019, including at hospital and local health district level, are available at [bhi.nsw.gov.au](http://bhi.nsw.gov.au)