

16 June 2021

Demand high for NSW hospital and ambulance services

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 2021.

BHI Chief Executive Dr Diane Watson said the *Healthcare Quarterly* results – which cover the period of extreme rainfall and widespread flooding in March 2021, as well as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic – showed there was high demand for healthcare services in NSW in January to March 2021.

“This report shows activity across the NSW healthcare system in January to March 2021 was either at or above those levels seen at the same time in 2020, while timeliness of care was down for key emergency department and ambulance measures,” said Dr Watson.

Emergency department

There were 759,157 emergency department (ED) attendances in NSW in January to March 2021, similar to the same quarter the previous year. When it came to timeliness of care at the state level:

- Around eight in 10 patients (83.8%) who arrived at an ED by ambulance were transferred into the care of ED staff within 30 minutes – down 4.7%, and the lowest percentage for any quarter in the past five years.
- Around seven in 10 ED patients (72.4%) were treated within clinically recommended time frames, down 1.7 percentage points.
- Almost seven in 10 patients (67.6%) spent four hours or less in the emergency department, down 3.0 percentage points, and the lowest percentage for any quarter in the past five years.

Elective surgery

“For the third consecutive quarter, elective surgeries were performed at historically high numbers in January to March 2021 as work continued to clear backlogs following the suspension of all non-urgent elective surgery in late March 2020,” said Dr Watson.

“The 58,000 elective surgeries performed in January to March 2021 was the highest of any first quarter since BHI began reporting in 2010.”

When it came to waiting lists and times:

- 61,390 patients were added to the elective surgery waiting list, up 4.4%.
- 88,908 patients were on the waiting list at the end of the quarter, down 1.7%.
- 5,227 patients had waited longer than the clinically recommended time frame at the end of the January to March 2021 quarter. This was up from 2,037 on 31 March 2020, but down from a high of 10,563 on 30 June 2020.

Ambulance

“NSW Ambulance had its busiest ever January to March quarter since BHI began reporting in 2010, with almost 315,000 responses, up 1.7% compared with the same quarter the previous year,” said Dr Watson.

There were 7,173 of the highest priority, life-threatening cases, up 6.8%. The percentage of these responses reached within 10 minutes was 67.6%, down 0.9 percentage points and the lowest of any January to March quarter since 2010.

Detailed results from *Healthcare Quarterly*, including at hospital and local health district level, are available at bhi.nsw.gov.au