

**3 May 2023**

## New report shows impact of COVID-19 on NSW healthcare system across pandemic

The Bureau of Health Information (BHI) has today released its latest *Healthcare in Focus* report, which reflects on the pandemic's effects on key aspects of public health system performance throughout 2020 to 2022.

*Healthcare in Focus – New South Wales and the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2022* examines public hospital activity and performance, including patients' experiences, across multiple sectors of the healthcare system – focusing on ambulance services; emergency departments (EDs); admitted patients; elective, or planned, surgery; and virtual care.

BHI Chief Executive Dr Diane Watson said the report illustrates a health system that was already at or near record levels of activity at the beginning of 2020, before the pandemic.

“While ambulance, ED, admitted patient and elective surgery activity fluctuated over the course of the pandemic, the NSW health system was once again experiencing high levels of demand by the end of 2022,” said Dr Watson.

“During this period, patients tended to wait longer to receive care than prior to the pandemic.”

The report uses patient survey results to track the impacts of COVID-19 on patients' experiences of care.

“In general, patients' overall experiences of care in NSW public hospitals had been improving leading up to 2020,” said Dr Watson. “While ratings of care did decrease at times during the pandemic, they generally remained above mid-2019 levels.”

The report also looks at patients' experiences of virtual care, which was used increasingly during the pandemic, and the experiences of patients transported by ambulance to the ED.

*Healthcare in Focus* also provides insights into patient outcomes. The number of deaths from any cause in NSW was lower than expected in 2020, within the expected range throughout 2021, and higher than expected in the first half of 2022.

Many people were admitted to hospital with COVID-19 between 2020 and 2022. However, fewer were admitted for respiratory and cardiac diseases and stroke than prior to the pandemic and fewer of these patients died within 30 days of their admission.

The report also highlights some key differences in how rural and urban areas experienced the pandemic.

### **Emergency Department Patient Survey 2021–22 results**

Also released today are the results of the Emergency Department Patient Survey (EDPS) 2021–22, which reflect the experiences of almost 22,000 people who attended one of 77 large EDs in NSW from July 2021 to June 2022.

“It's important to remember that this survey was in the field when health services and staff were managing the Delta and Omicron waves,” said Dr Watson. “This included additional preventative measures to ensure the safety of staff and patients, which may have affected experiences of care.”

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Almost nine in 10 patients (88%) said, overall, their care was 'very good' (61%) or 'good' (27%), and around nine in 10 (91%) rated the ED health professionals who treated them as 'very good' (65%) or 'good' (26%).

For the majority of survey questions, patients were slightly less positive than the previous survey. However, there were some questions that decreased more notably. For example, 55% of patients rated how ED health professionals worked together as 'very good' (compared with 59% in 2020–21).

The Snapshot report also compares the experiences of patients who attended EDs in urban hospitals with those who attended EDs in rural hospitals. For most questions, there were no significant differences in experiences between rural and urban patients.

*Healthcare in Focus – New South Wales and the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2022* and the results of the Emergency Department Patient Survey 2021–22 are available at [bhi.nsw.gov.au](https://bhi.nsw.gov.au)

More detailed EDPS 2021–22 results, including for individual EDs, are available in the supplementary data tables and on the [BHI Data Portal](#).