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Busiest quarter on record for NSW emergency departments

More people attended NSW emergency departments (EDs) during January to March 2019 than in any previous quarter on record, the latest Bureau of Health Information (BHI) *Healthcare Quarterly* report shows.

There were more than 750,000 ED attendances across the state – 5.9% more than the same quarter last year. At the same time, the timeliness of care provided in EDs was down across key measures at state level.

“Emergency departments across the state experienced high demand during the quarter, particularly from patients triaged as emergency or urgent, while there was also a notable 10% increase in arrivals at emergency departments by ambulance,” BHI Chief Executive Dr Diane Watson said.

The report shows, compared with the same quarter last year:

- About seven in 10 ED patients (71.9%) were treated within clinically recommended timeframes, down 4.3 percentage points.
- About seven in 10 patients (70.6%) spent four hours or less in EDs, down 3.8 percentage points.
- Almost nine in 10 patients (88.8%) had their care transferred from paramedics to hospital staff within 30 minutes, down 3.3 percentage points.

“At NSW level, the timeliness of care provided to patients has declined from last year. The results vary across hospitals – with some experiencing bigger drops than we see at NSW level, while others had stable or improved performance despite increased activity,” Dr Watson said.

NSW Ambulance also experienced a very busy quarter, with more than 300,000 responses, up 10.2% from the same quarter last year. More than 136,000 ambulance responses were categorised as emergencies and, of these, more than 6,000 responses were for life-threatening cases.

“This was a very busy quarter for our ambulance services, with an additional 28,000 responses compared with the same quarter last year. While we did see increases in response times for the broader emergency category, the median response time for life-threatening cases remained stable at seven and a half minutes,” Dr Watson said.

This issue of *Healthcare Quarterly* features a new BHI-designed reporting system which provides ambulance activity and performance measures for 91 standard geographical areas rather than the 18 ambulance zones previously reported on.

“Our ambulance reporting now gives consumers and health service providers in NSW more localised and meaningful information about the performance of ambulance services,” Dr Watson said.

The *Healthcare Quarterly* report and associated information products, including local hospital and ambulance information, are available at bhi.nsw.gov.au