

Snapshot



Emergency department

Results from the 2020–21 patient survey





We heard from almost **21,000 people** about their experiences of care in NSW emergency departments



Emergency departments (EDs) provide patients with access to care in their time of need. EDs are open to everyone, offering specialised assessment and life-saving care for patients.

The results of the Emergency Department Patient Survey 2020–21 reflect the experiences of 20,728 patients who attended one of 77 large EDs in NSW public hospitals from July 2020 to June 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in significant changes in how services were delivered in EDs in NSW. Since 2020, progressive COVID-19 outbreaks have also resulted in fluctuations in ED activity.

Results for individual hospitals are available in the supplementary data tables and on the BHI Data Portal at bhi.nsw.gov.au

Overall ratings of care: Almost nine in 10 patients (89%) said, overall, the care they received was ‘very good’ (62%) or ‘good’ (27%). More than six in 10 patients (65%) said, overall, they would rate the ED health professionals who treated them as ‘very good’ (pages 4–5).

Patient-centred care: Almost nine in 10 patients (87%) said they were ‘always’ treated with respect and dignity in the ED. Around eight in 10 patients (81%) said they were ‘always’ given enough privacy while they were in the ED (pages 6–7).

Patient engagement: Around eight in 10 patients (81%) said ED health professionals ‘always’ explained things in a way they could understand. More than six in 10 patients (64%) said they were ‘definitely’ involved as much as they wanted to be in decisions about their care (pages 8–9).

Engagement at discharge: Almost seven in 10 patients (69%) said they ‘definitely’ felt involved in decisions about discharge. Around six in 10 patients (62%) said they were told about what signs or symptoms, related to their illness or treatment, to watch out for after they went home (pages 10–11).

Experiences in rural and urban EDs: Patients in rural and urban EDs gave mostly positive ratings of their care. For the majority of questions, there were no significant differences in experiences between the two groups, including ratings of overall care, doctors, or nurses (pages 12–13).

Patient experience by month: There was a steady improvement in patients' ratings of their overall care from July 2019 until May 2020. From May to December 2020, these ratings declined, before stabilising across the first half of 2021. A similar trend was observed for patients' ratings of how well health professionals worked together (page 14–15).

Overall, **89%** of patients rated their care as



‘very good’ 62%

‘good’ 27%

Overall ratings of care

Overall ratings of care reflect general measures of patient satisfaction about their ED experience.

Almost nine in 10 patients (89%) said, overall, the care they received was 'very good' (62%) or 'good' (27%) (Figure 1a). For those patients who said 'very good', results ranged from 46% to 80% across EDs (Figure 2a).

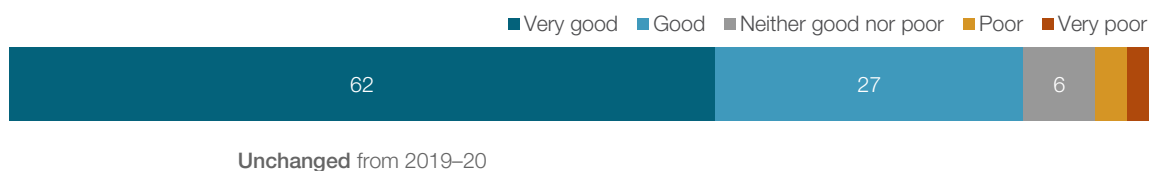
More than six in 10 patients (65%) said, overall, they would rate the ED health professionals who treated them as 'very good', down from 69% in 2019–20 (Figure 1b).

When asked to rate how well ED health professionals worked together, almost six in 10 patients (59%) said 'very good' (Figure 1c). Across hospitals, results ranged from 42% to 74% (Figure 2c).

Some patient groups tend to respond more positively to surveys. This means that EDs with higher proportions of patients with these characteristics tend to have higher patient experience ratings. To enable a fairer comparison across EDs, BHI has taken into account differences in patient characteristics (age, sex, education and language spoken at home) at each ED. Therefore, when an ED is flagged as having a significantly higher or lower result than NSW, this is more likely to reflect differences in patient experiences and less likely to reflect differences in the ED's patient mix. For further details, please see the survey's technical supplement at bhi.nsw.gov.au

Figure 1 Percentage of patients in NSW, all response categories, 2020–21

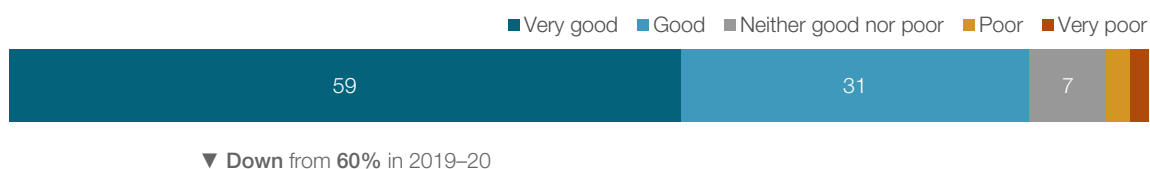
a. Overall, how would you rate the care you received while in the ED?



b. Overall, how would you rate the ED health professionals who treated you?



c. How would you rate how the ED health professionals worked together?



Note: Results may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

When patients were asked whether the care and treatment helped them...

69%

said

'yes, definitely'



25%

said

'yes, to some extent'

Best part of care...

“

The treating doctors were very professional and I felt confident in the treatment and advice I was provided whilst in the ED.

”

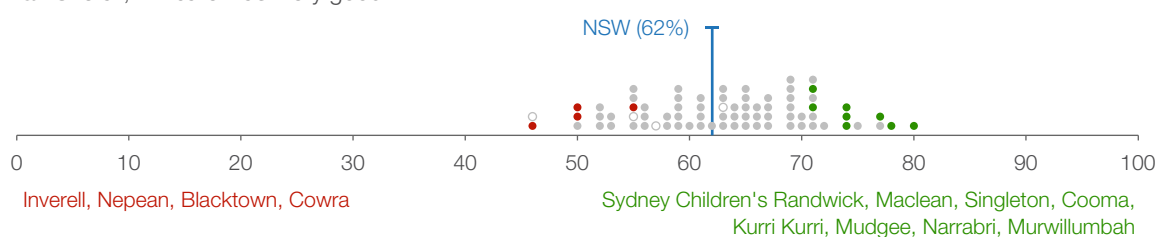
In the figures below, each dot represents an individual ED's result. After accounting for patient characteristics, EDs with results significantly different from NSW are listed below the graph in order from lowest to highest. Detailed results for all EDs are available in the BHI Data Portal and the supplementary data tables at bhi.nsw.gov.au

Figure 2

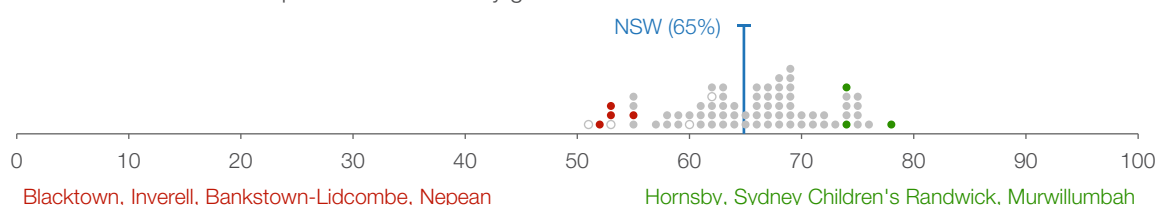
Percentage of patients in each emergency department who selected the most positive response option, 2020–21

ED result relative to NSW: • Significantly lower • Not significantly different • Significantly higher ○ Interpret with caution

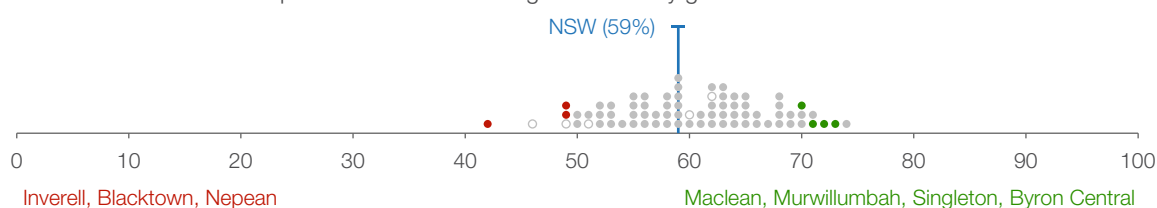
a. Overall, ED care was 'very good'



b. Would rate ED health professionals as 'very good'



c. Rated how ED health professionals worked together as 'very good'



Note: An ED is noted as having a result that is significantly higher or significantly lower than the NSW result for a question after differences in patient characteristics (age, sex, education and language spoken at home) have been taken into account. Due to greater variability in ED results with fewer respondents, EDs marked 'Interpret with caution' are not compared with the NSW result.

Patient-centred care

Patients shared their experiences of a range of aspects of their care and treatment in the ED, including whether they were treated with respect and dignity, the attentiveness of staff and if they were given enough privacy.

Almost nine in 10 patients (87%) said they were 'always' treated with respect and dignity in the ED (Figure 3a). Across EDs, results ranged from 78% to 94% (Figure 4a).

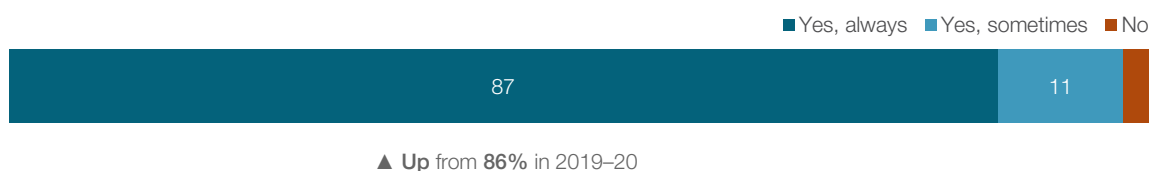
Almost eight in 10 patients (79%) said, while waiting to be treated, ED staff checked on their condition (Figure 3b). This was up from 75% in 2019–20. Across EDs, results ranged from 67% to 95% (Figure 4b).

Around eight in 10 patients (81%) said they were 'always' given enough privacy in the ED (Figure 3c). Across EDs, results ranged from 71% to 93% (Figure 4c).

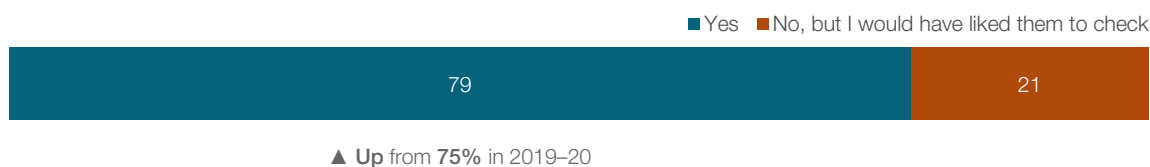
More than four in 10 patients (46%) said they were told by ED staff how long they might have to wait for treatment, up from 40% in 2019–20. Of the 77 EDs included in this survey, 27 improved on this measure by five percentage points or more while two declined by five percentage points or more (data not shown). More results for individual hospitals are available in the supplementary data tables and on the BHI Data Portal at bhi.nsw.gov.au

Figure 3 Percentage of patients in NSW, all response options, 2020–21

a. Were you treated with respect and dignity while you were in the ED?



b. While you were waiting to be treated, did the ED staff check on your condition?



c. Were you given enough privacy during your visit to the ED?



Note: Results may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

What could improve...

“

I waited a long time for treatment and to see a doctor... I was exhausted and sat on the chair all night. No one attended to me.

”



More than four in 10 patients (46%) said they were told by ED staff how long they might have to wait for treatment

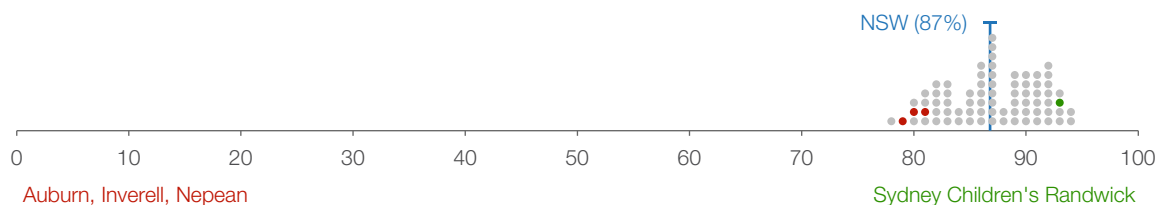
Up from 40% in 2019–20

Figure 4

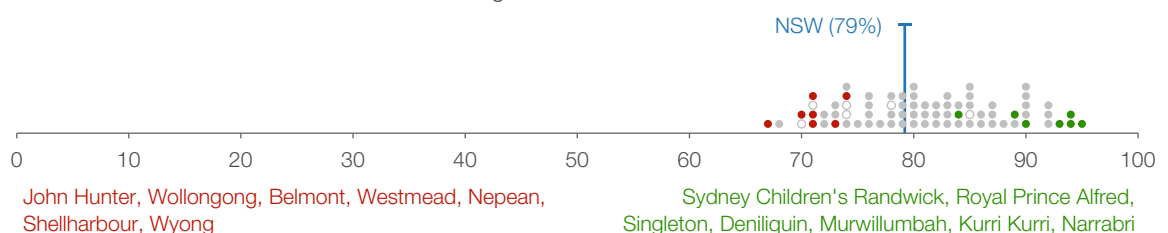
Percentage of patients in each emergency department who selected the most positive response option, 2020–21

ED result relative to NSW: ● Significantly lower ● Not significantly different ● Significantly higher ○ Interpret with caution

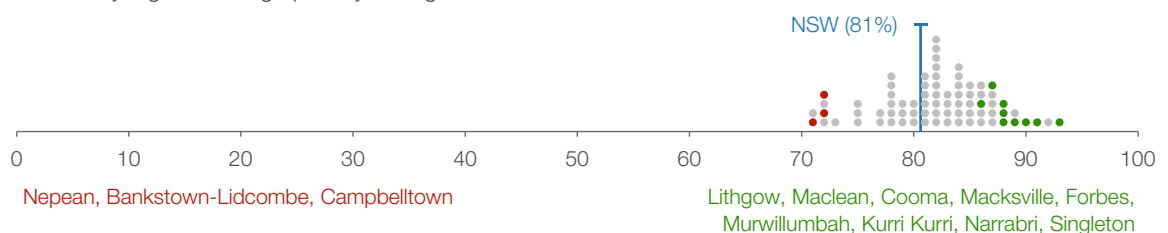
a. 'Always' treated with respect and dignity while in the ED



b. ED staff checked on condition while waiting to be treated



c. 'Always' given enough privacy during visit to the ED



Note: An ED is noted as having a result that is significantly higher or significantly lower than the NSW result for a question after differences in patient characteristics (age, sex, education and language spoken at home) have been taken into account. Due to greater variability in ED results with fewer respondents, ED's marked 'Interpret with caution' are not compared with the NSW result.

Patient engagement

When patients are kept informed and involved in decisions about their care, they feel more engaged and supported, which can contribute to better health outcomes.

Around eight in 10 patients (81%) said ED health professionals 'always' explained things in a way they could understand (Figure 5a). Across EDs, results ranged from 70% to 93% (Figure 6a).

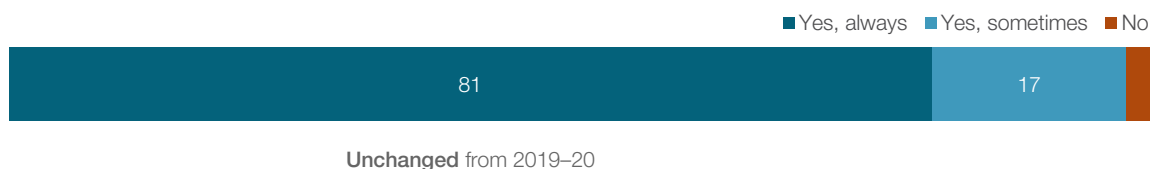
Around seven in 10 patients (72%) said they had enough time to discuss their health or medical problem with the ED health professionals (Figure 5b). Across EDs, results ranged from 54% to 84% (Figure 6b).

More than six in 10 patients (64%) said they were 'definitely' involved in decisions about their care and treatment as much as they wanted to be (Figure 5c). Across EDs, results ranged from 55% to 79% (Figure 6c).

Around eight in 10 patients (81%) said they did not receive contradictory information about their condition or treatment. However, one in five patients (19%) said they received contradictory information (data not shown).

Figure 5 Percentage of patients in NSW, all response options, 2020–21

a. Did the ED health professionals explain things in a way you could understand?



b. Did you have enough time to discuss your health or medical problem with the ED health professionals?

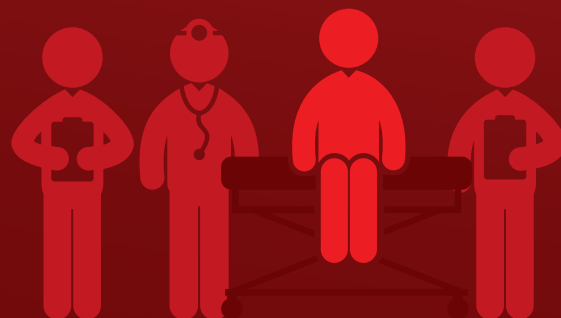


c. Were you involved, as much as you wanted to be, in decisions about your care and treatment?*



* Based on the responses of 19,744 patients (97%), who wanted, or were well enough to be involved in decisions about, their care and treatment.
Note: Results may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Almost one in five patients (19%) said they received contradictory information about their condition or treatment



What could improve...

“

There did not appear to be one person responsible overall for my care.

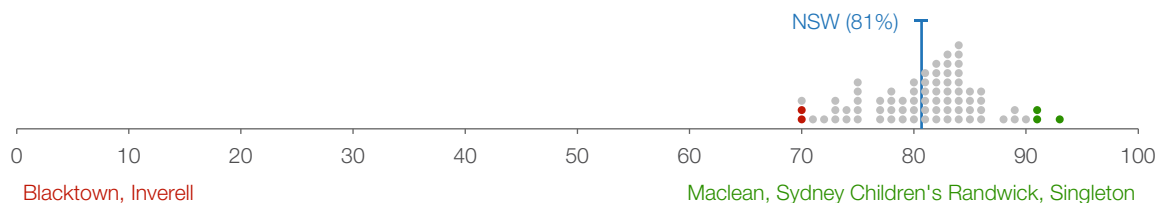
”

Figure 6

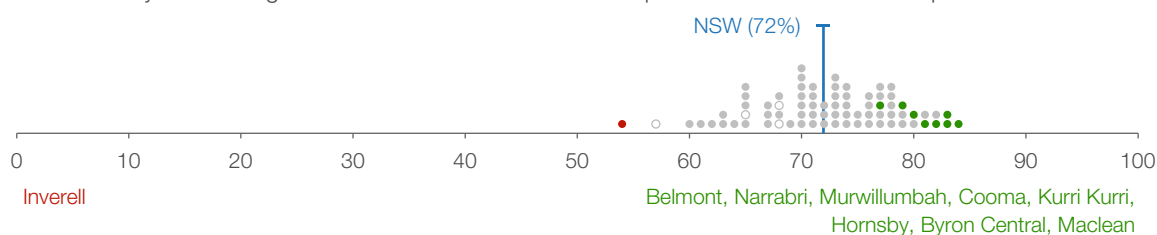
Percentage of patients in each emergency department who selected the most positive response option, 2020–21

ED result relative to NSW: • Significantly lower • Not significantly different • Significantly higher ○ Interpret with caution

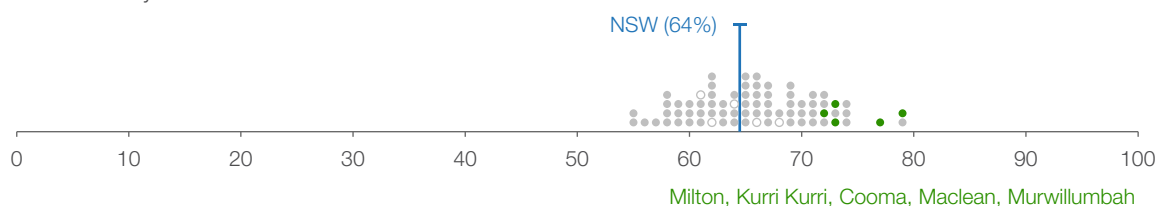
a. ED health professionals 'always' explained things in an understandable way



b. 'Definitely' had enough time to discuss health or medical problem with the ED health professionals



c. 'Definitely' involved in decisions about care and treatment



Note: An ED is noted as having a result that is significantly higher or significantly lower than the NSW result for a question after differences in patient characteristics (age, sex, education and language spoken at home) have been taken into account. Due to greater variability in ED results with fewer respondents, ED's marked 'Interpret with caution' are not compared with the NSW result.

Engagement at discharge

The survey also captured patients' experiences at discharge and outcomes after leaving the ED.

Almost seven in 10 patients (69%) felt involved in decisions about their discharge from ED (Figure 7a).

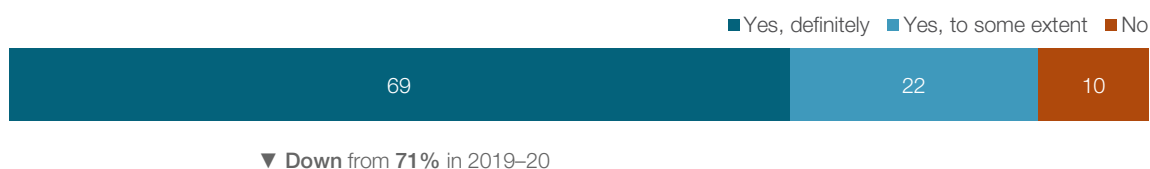
Almost seven in 10 patients (68%) said that they were given enough information about how to manage their care at home when they left the ED (Figure 7b).

Around six in 10 patients (62%) were told what signs or symptoms, related to their illness or treatment, to watch out for after they went home (Figure 7c).

More than six in 10 patients (65%) said they were provided with a discharge summary before leaving the ED. Of the 77 EDs included in this survey, 24 improved on this measure by five percentage points or more while three declined by five percentage points or more (data not shown). More results for individual hospitals are available in the supplementary data tables and on the BHI Data Portal at bhi.nsw.gov.au

Figure 7 Percentage of patients in NSW, all response options, 2020–21

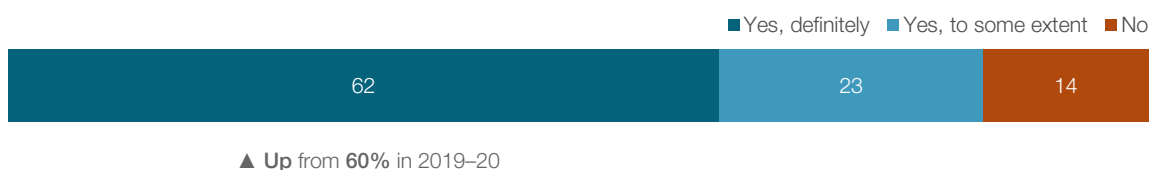
a. Did you feel involved in decisions about your discharge from the ED?*



b. Thinking about when you left the ED, were you given enough information about how to manage your care at home?†



c. Were you told about what signs or symptoms, related to your illness or treatment, to watch out for after you went home?



* Based on the responses of 13,018 patients (92%) who wanted to be involved in decisions about their discharge.

† Based on the responses of 13,391 patients (94%) who needed information about how to manage their care at home.

Best part of care...

“

Getting the report about treatment that I took to my local GP... was very helpful

”

More than six in 10 patients (65%) said they were provided with a discharge summary before leaving the ED

Up from 62% in 2019–20

EMERGENCY

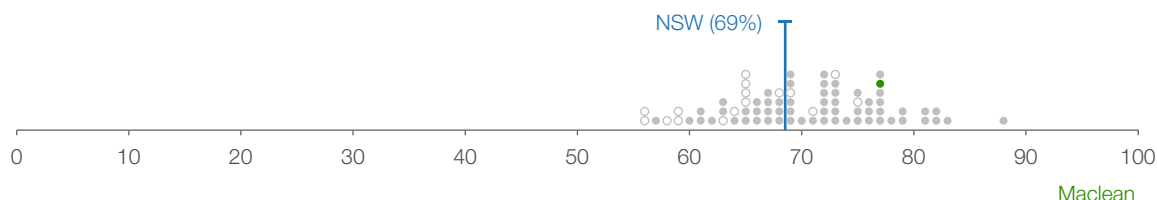


Figure 8

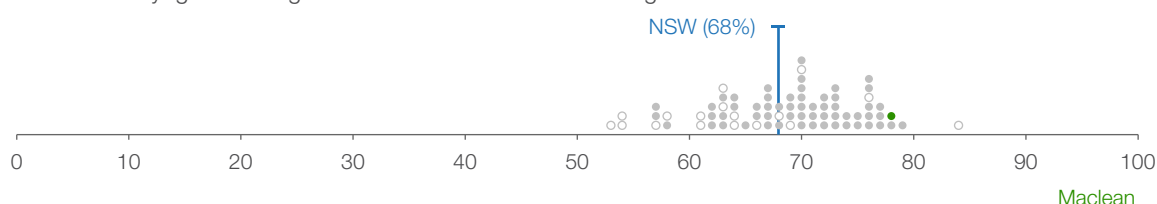
Percentage of patients in each emergency department who selected the most positive response option, 2020–21

ED result relative to NSW: • Significantly lower • Not significantly different • Significantly higher ○ Interpret with caution

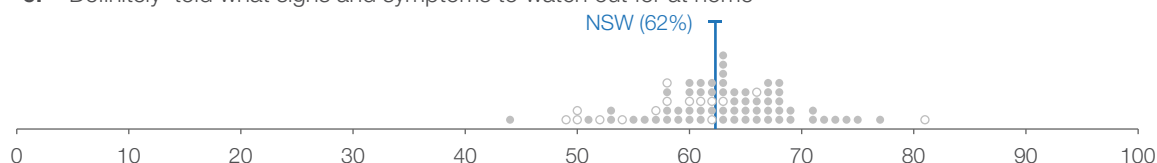
a. 'Definitely' felt involved in decisions about discharge



b. 'Definitely' given enough information about how to manage care at home



c. 'Definitely' told what signs and symptoms to watch out for at home[§]



[§] There were no EDs that had a significantly higher or lower result than NSW for this measure.

Note: An ED is noted as having a result that is significantly higher or significantly lower than the NSW result for a question after differences in patient characteristics (age, sex, education and language spoken at home) have been taken into account. Due to greater variability in ED results with fewer respondents, ED's marked 'Interpret with caution' are not compared with the NSW result.

Experiences in rural and urban EDs

BHI conducted analyses for this Snapshot report to examine the experiences of patients who attended EDs in the urban and larger rural public hospitals included in this survey.

Patients in rural and urban EDs gave mostly positive ratings of their care. For the majority of questions in the survey, there were no significant differences in experiences between rural and urban patients, including ratings of overall care and ED health professionals. There were also no significant differences in experiences related to outcomes of care.

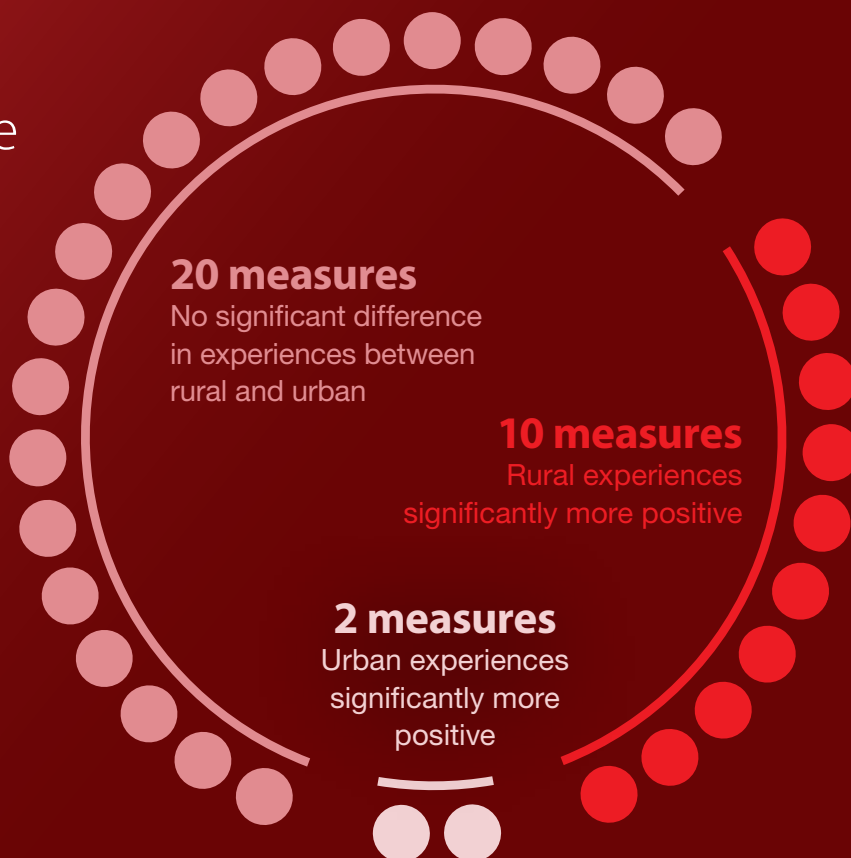
However, patients who attended rural EDs were significantly more likely to say they 'definitely' felt involved in decisions about their care and treatment (67%) compared with those who attended urban EDs (64%). Patients were also significantly more likely to say they were 'definitely' involved in decisions about their discharge (71%) in rural EDs when compared with those who attended urban EDs (67%).

Clear information is also important to patients.

Patients attending urban EDs were significantly more likely to say they were provided with a document that summarised the care they received (75%) when compared with rural EDs (45%).

Urban EDs include those in areas classified as major cities and rural EDs include those in areas classified as inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote. Patient characteristics (age, sex, education level and language spoken at home) have been taken into account when looking at significant differences between urban and rural ED results. For more information, see the technical supplement. Detailed results for survey questions by patient groups, including rurality of facility can be searched on the BHI Data Portal at bhi.nsw.gov.au/data-portal

We compared the experiences of care at rural and urban EDs across 32 measures





“

Everyone was pleasant and didn't rush me into decisions.

”

“

Our family has been using this local hospital for years and we are always very impressed by the service there. From the wards people who check in on us after admission all the way up to the senior doctors.

”

Patient experience by month

The NSW health system faced numerous challenges during 2020 and 2021 as it responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, continuing to evolve its responses to waves of new variants to help protect the community.

Patients' ratings of care are presented here for each month from July 2019, before the beginning of the pandemic, through to June 2021, to provide insights into patient experience at different times across the two years.

In July 2019, more than five in 10 patients (54%) said, overall, their care was 'very good'. This steadily increased by month until May 2020. From May 2020 to December 2020, patients' ratings of their overall care declined, before stabilising across the first half of 2021. In June 2021, six in 10 patients (60%) said their overall care was 'very good' (Figure 9). A similar trend was observed for patients' ratings of how well health professionals worked together (Figure 10).

From July 2019 through to June 2021, the percentage of patients who said ED health professionals 'always' explained things in a way they could understand remained stable (Figure 11).

Looking at results by month, there were no significant differences between rural and urban EDs in relation to overall ratings of care, health professionals working well together and providing understandable explanations (data not shown).

To see changes from the previous survey for all comparable questions at NSW, local health district and hospital levels, please see the supplementary data tables to this report and the BHI Data Portal at bhi.nsw.gov.au

Figure 9 Percentage of patients in NSW, who rated their care overall as 'very good', July to June 2020–21 and 2019–20

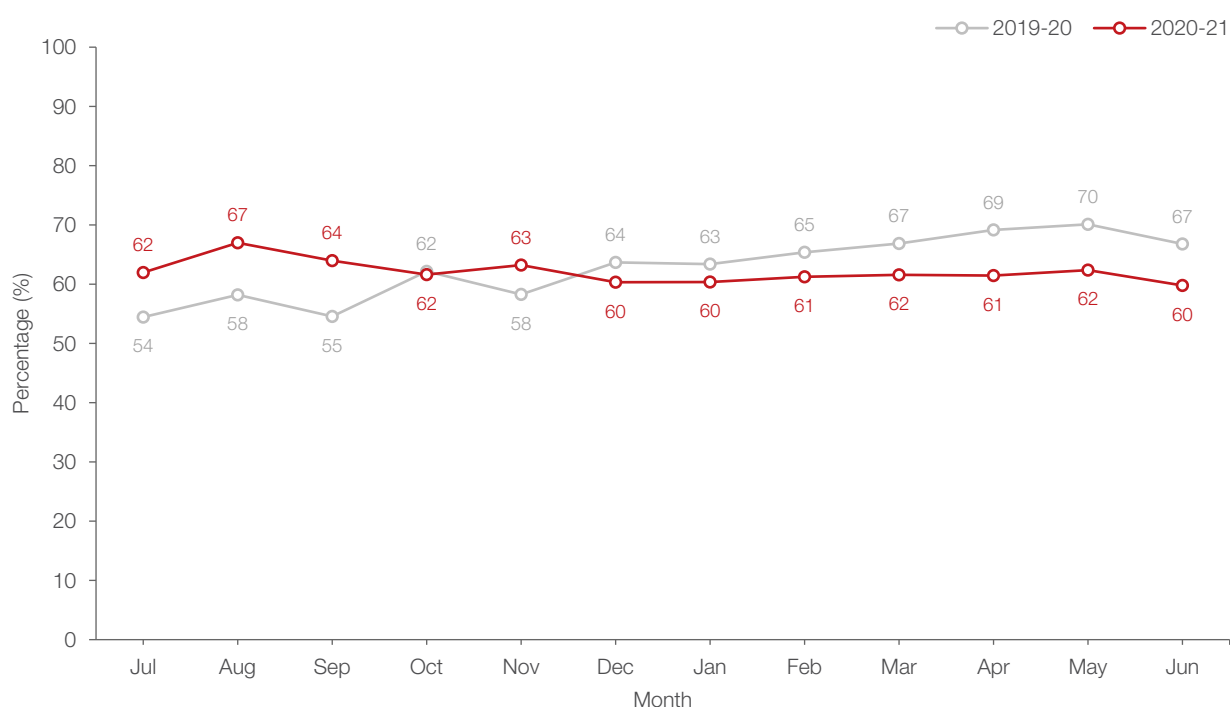


Figure 10 Percentage of patients in NSW, who said ED health professionals 'always' worked well together, July to June 2020–21 and 2019–20

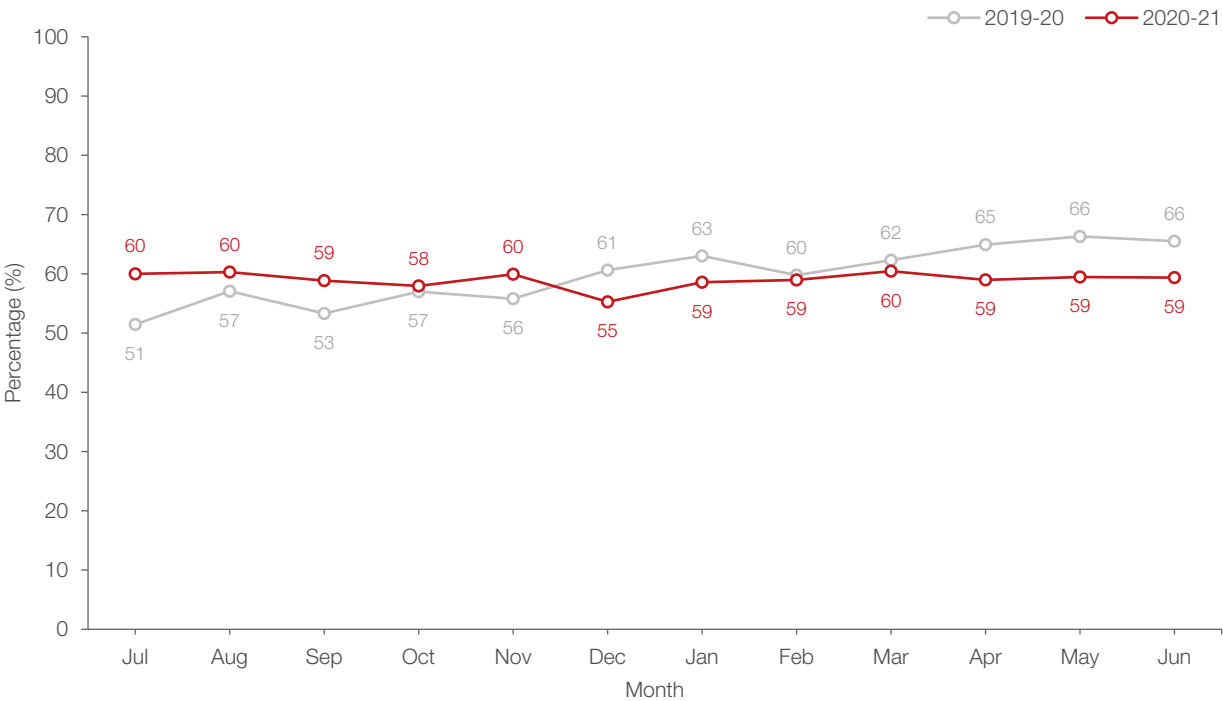
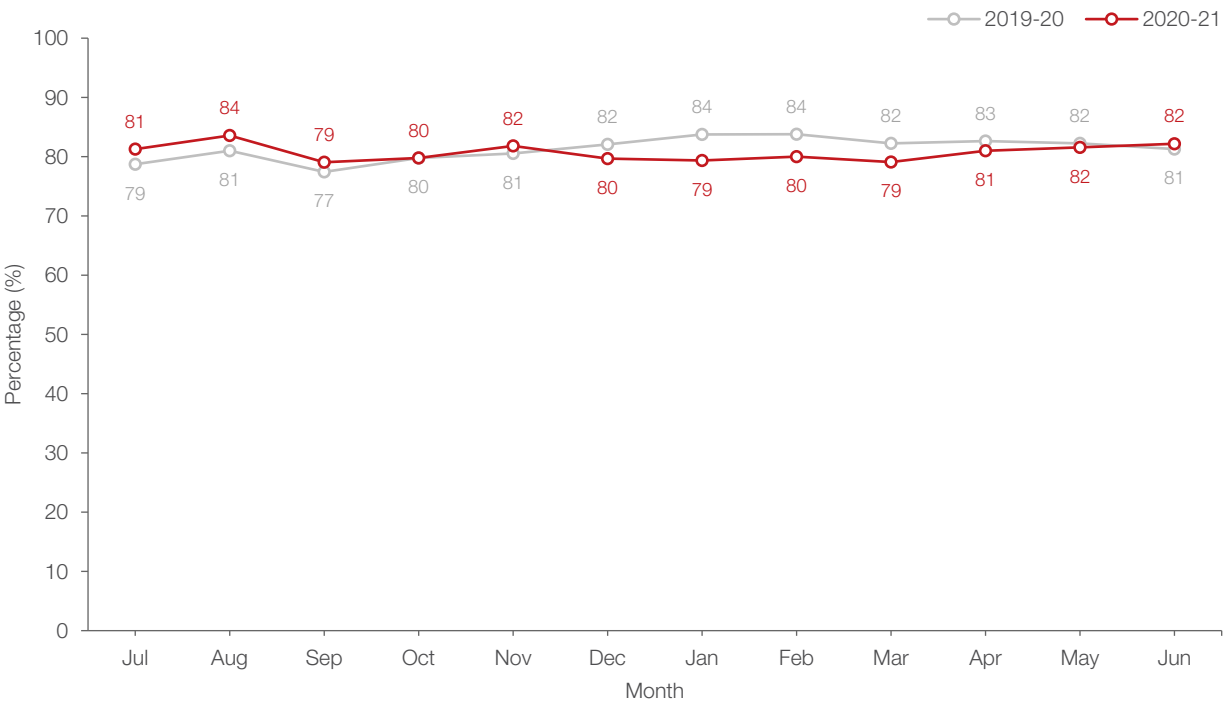


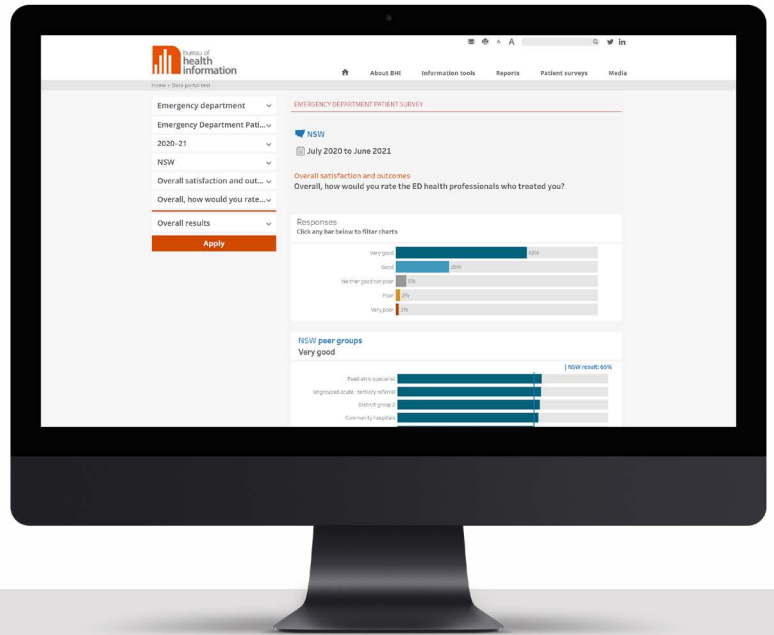
Figure 11 Percentage of patients in NSW, who said ED health professionals 'always' explained things in a way they could understand, July to June 2020–21 and 2019–20



Data portal

The new **BHI Data Portal** is part of a transition to a digital-first way of reporting healthcare performance results in NSW, making them more accessible and user friendly.

The new portal allows you to find and compare activity and performance, and patient survey results, including for the larger individual hospitals and local health districts.



Adult Admitted Patient Survey



Emergency Department Patient Survey



Outpatient Cancer Clinics Survey



Virtual Care Survey



Maternity Care Survey



Rural Hospital Adult Admitted Patient Survey



Rural Hospital Emergency Care Patient Survey

NSW Patient Survey Program

Each month we ask thousands of people in NSW to tell us about their recent experience with the public healthcare system as part of the NSW Patient Survey Program.

The surveys ask people questions about different aspects of their care such as compassion, respect and kindness, involvement in decision-making, effective communication, and a safe, comfortable environment.

Further information about our surveys can be found at bhi.nsw.gov.au/nsw_patient_survey_program

About the Bureau of Health Information

BHI is a board-governed organisation that publishes independent reports and information about the performance of the healthcare system in NSW.

We aim to provide the community, health professionals and policy makers with information that enhances visibility and understanding of the performance of the healthcare system, in order to inform actions to improve healthcare and strengthen accountability.



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