



MEDIA RELEASE

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AMA TASMANIA CALLS FOR AN URGENT ROUNDTABLE

AMA Tasmania calls for an urgent roundtable to be convened by the Secretary of the Department of Health to discuss solutions to the crisis being felt at the Royal Hobart and Launceston General Hospitals.

Both the RHH and LGH are at breaking point.

Both emergency departments are in crisis mode with ambulances ramping, police unable to hand over mental health patients and patients left in waiting rooms who should be in a bed all because our ED's are bed blocked with admitted patients.

At the other end of the system, patients are having critical elective surgery cancelled, others bed blocked in ICU for lack of available medical beds on wards and acute care patients receiving ICU treatment in recovery wards due to lack of available ICU beds.

Staff are exhausted and distraught at not being able to provide the right care in the right environment within the hospital.

In addition, patients waiting for critical surgery to treat their cancer have their surgery cancelled because of a lack of beds, particularly critical care beds.

All of this, and we are yet to start this winter's flu season. As can be seen, by what is happening in Victoria right now, we still live with the genuine threat of an outbreak of COVID-19 in Tasmania, which would make the situation catastrophic.

Why is there a problem? Several reasons – lack of skilled staff preventing the opening of more beds, the need for more in-patient mental health beds, the impact of the COVID programs on staffing, the ageing population, the blow out in elective surgery waiting list. Some patients being in the wrong care environment blocking acute care beds and some aged care and disability care patients in both major hospitals can take up beds for weeks at a time simply because there are problems accessing appropriate care for them in the community.

In effect, we are seeing the shift of commonwealth responsibilities onto the state hospital system as assessment for aged care packages and NDIS packages are taking too long, and insufficient registered nursing staff are being employed within residential aged care facilities.

AMA Tasmania understands that at this moment, around thirty patients in each hospital have been there for some time and require 'sitters' to ensure their safety within the hospital environment. Some of these people with appropriate support could be cared for in aged care facilities.

Further complicating the situation, several skilled nursing staff having gone across to deliver the states COVID vaccination program and work in the quarantine hotels. While this program is critical, there are quite a few health professionals, most importantly, our GPs, who could step in to assist with immunising the public if paid appropriately to do so.

Considering many of the nurses have gone into the COVID programs to get a break from the stress of the hospital system as well as receive payment incentives, those nurses and their colleagues still working in critical care, must be rewarded for their hard work and incentives offered so that they are not worse off.

We need to look at innovative short-term solutions that will help us move those patients no longer needing acute care out of the hospital into other care environments with the resources necessary to look after them.

This is why the AMA is calling on an urgent roundtable to be convened, bringing together clinical leaders from across both hospitals, senior management, district hospital management, the AMA and ANMF, Aged Care and Disability providers and both the state and commonwealth government to find immediate solutions to free up beds. >>>ENDS.

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