



AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION (SA) INC

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South Australia receives dismal marks in AMA's 2021 Public Hospital Report Card

The president of the Australian Medical Association in South Australia (AMA(SA)) says the [AMA's '2021 Public Hospital Report Card'](#) provides hard-hitting evidence of the crisis that exists within the state's health system, which soon must bear the extra burden of COVID-19.

AMA(SA) President Dr Michelle Atchison says the annual Report Card shows that even within an overwhelmed national hospital system, South Australia continues to demonstrate major shortfalls in meeting patients' needs.

"Code yellow" and other emergency declarations are becoming distressingly common – and this is in a state where the impact of COVID-19 on hospital presentations has been very low," Dr Atchison said. "Along with our peers across the country, South Australian medicos are holding our collective breath as we await the true impacts of the Delta variant and long COVID on our hospitals, our patients, and our economy."

'As national president Dr Omar Khorshid said this morning of the nation's hospitals, "as good as it gets" is about to get much worse.'

Dr Atchison said the figures and commentary reflect the situation in South Australia's public hospitals in 2020 – a year that included a lockdown period and in which some patients delayed seeking care because of real or perceived risks of COVID-19 infection.

'The numbers demonstrate a system in crisis – a system in which patients who should be able to expect to be cared for quickly and safely does not and apparently cannot meet those expectations,' Dr Atchison said. 'Now we are facing the additional burden that will come when the state's borders open to COVID cases on 23 November.'

'If South Australia's hospitals can't cope now, what's going to happen when the impacts of COVID cases hit in 2022?'

AMA(SA) Vice President Dr John Williams said the AMA analysis of 2019-20 data relating to South Australian hospitals demonstrated declines in key measures that AMA(SA), clinicians and patients have highlighted for some years.

- South Australians have a one in two chance of being seen within 30 minutes in public hospital emergency departments (EDs). The proportion of ED patients seen within 30 minutes increased from 46 per cent in 2018-19 to 55 per cent in 2019-20. South Australia's 55 per cent was 12 per cent lower than the national average of 67 per cent – and occurred in a period in which for several weeks, many patients avoided the state's EDs because of the fear of COVID infection.
- After decreasing markedly during March 2020, the number of 'urgent' emergency presentations in South Australian EDs increased to end the year 5 per cent higher than in 2018-19.
- South Australia was third worst of the states and territories in having ED visits completed in four hours or less, with 62 per cent. The national average was 69 per cent, and the best state performance 75 per cent.

5 November 2021

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- The median waiting time for elective surgery rose from 41 in 2018-19 to 43 days in 2019-20, compared with the national average of 39 days. The median waiting time in South Australia has increased by eight days in six years.
- The proportion of Category 2 elective surgery patients admitted within 90 days decreased from 83 per cent in 2018-19 to 79 per cent in 2019-20, continuing a decline apparent since a high of 92 per cent in 2014-15.

Dr Williams said clinicians across the state are worried about the impact of opening the borders on case numbers, how patients will be managed, and the care patients will receive – in hospital and in all other health care settings.

‘People go to hospital if they are very sick, or if they can’t – or don’t think they can – quickly access the care they need elsewhere in the health system,’ Dr Williams said.

‘Investment in primary care will reduce the load on our hospitals, ensuring better, faster care for the people who are very sick with COVID or one of the many other conditions that requires treatment in hospital.

‘As doctors, we need to know how Commonwealth Governments – through the public health networks (PHNs) – and SA Health are planning to resource us and other health providers in local communities to keep people out of hospital when the borders open, so our hospitals do not completely collapse under the pressure.’

AMA(SA) Vice President Dr John Williams will be available for comment at 10 am on Friday, 4 November 2021, at Level 1, 175 Fullarton Road, Dulwich.

For more information, contact Senior Policy, Media and Communications Advisor Karen Phillips on 0402 103 451.

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