

MEDIA RELEASE

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Health system continues to fail people with poor mental health

Australia's health system is continuing to fail patients suffering from poor mental health, with more patients needing acute care and facing long waits in emergency departments.

The Australian Medical Association's *Public hospital report card: mental health edition* shows more patients with mental health-related conditions are arriving in emergency departments by ambulance and police services, and more are arriving in a critical condition needing urgent care.

AMA President Professor Steve Robson said the latest data showed the length of stay in EDs for patients presenting with mental health-related conditions was at its highest since 2016–2017, with patients in some states waiting in EDs for as long as 30 hours.

"This is a direct result of the hospital logjam, the same logjam that results in ambulance ramping and people waiting too long for surgery," Professor Robson said.

"These long waits, which are directly due to a lack of inpatient beds, cause distress for patients and their families and place enormous pressure on hospital staff."

"Emergency departments are no place for someone suffering a critical mental health illness. They are not designed in a way that's conducive to good mental health care.

"Australia is failing to provide appropriate, acceptable care to these most vulnerable of patients. This needs to change, and it needs to change urgently."

The report found that across all states and territories there were increased numbers of patients triaged for resuscitation or emergency (to be seen within 10 minutes) for mental health-related conditions.

"The situation is distressing for staff working in EDs, who are not supported or sufficiently resourced to manage patients with complex mental health issues and patients who can become agitated when facing long waits for care," Professor Robson said.

"The result of these compounding issues is that doctors and nurses are under increasing pressure, leading to stress, burnout and the emergence of their own mental health issues.

"Without real reform, we will continue to see high suicide rates among people suffering from poor mental health and medical and health staff leaving the profession due to burnout and stress. We need state and territory governments and the federal government to act soon to address the current situation and ensure things don't get worse."

The AMA is proposing concrete solutions including measures to ensure more patients are seen in primary care settings; increasing the number of mental health beds in public hospitals and improving access to private psychiatry.

Read the [AMA Public hospital report card: mental health edition 2023](#)

Find out more about our [Clear the Logjam Campaign](#)

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