

26 February 2024

The Hon Shannon Fentiman MP
Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services
Minister for Women
GPO Box 48
BRISBANE QLD 4001

Mr Michael Walsh
Director-General
Queensland Health

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By email: [REDACTED]

Subject: Inadequate ED consultant ratios and time-to-treatment measurement

Dear Minister and Director-General

AMA Queensland's Committee of Consultant Specialists (CCS) was established to advise and report to the AMA Queensland Council on emerging issues in consultant specialist practice. CCS has identified two key operational concerns that are negatively impacting emergency departments (EDs) and patients across the state, namely:

- 1. inadequate ratios of senior ED physicians to patient flow; and
- 2. insufficient time-to-treatment measurement.

The first issue directly contributes to ED bottlenecks since all but the most minor patient cases need to be reviewed by a senior ED physician before discharge or inter-hospital transfer but hospitals employ too few to meet their requisite patient presentations and flow.

The Australian College of Emergency Medicine (ACEM) has recommended guidelines for senior, intermediate and junior ED doctors across different sized EDs (please refer to [ACEM's website here](#)), however, clinicians advise that nearly all EDs in Queensland do not adhere to the guidelines. This is reportedly despite availability of senior ED consultants in most HHS catchments.

The second issue (insufficient time-to-treatment measurement in EDs) is masking the true data for regional, rural, remote and 'suburban' (i.e. non-major tertiary hospital) patients and likely resulting in poorer health outcomes in comparison to metropolitan patients.

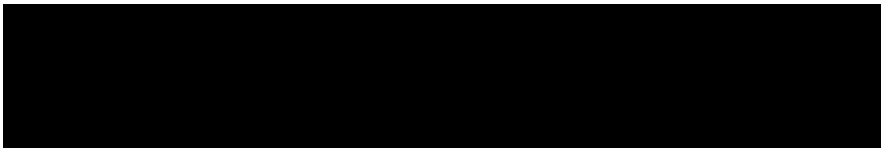
Doctors advise that the time-to-treatment metric, as used on Queensland Health's Hospital Performance website, does not reflect the true wait times for non-major tertiary hospital patients because wait times are not aggregated when patients are transferred between facilities. Instead, the patients' wait time is restarted upon presentation at the major facility.

This results in many of these patients experiencing delays in obtaining surgical and other treatment that is not reflected in the Department's data. Worse still, such delays are recognised as key

causes of poor health outcomes and death in the [Queensland Audit of Surgical Mortality \(June 2023\)](#).

AMA Queensland acknowledges your commitment to equitable access and health outcomes for all Queenslanders regardless of where they live. As such, we would welcome an opportunity to meet with you further to discuss these concerns.

Yours sincerely



Dr Maria Boulton
President
AMA Queensland

Dr Brett Dale
Chief Executive Officer
AMA Queensland