



MANY SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MENTAL HEALTH PATIENTS WAITING MORE THAN 30 HOURS IN EDs

South Australian patients suffering from severe mental health problems are spending longer in overcrowded emergency departments than anywhere else in mainland Australia.

The Australian Medical Association's [Public hospital report card: mental health edition](#) shows patients who were admitted to South Australia's public hospitals with mental health-related conditions during 2022/23 were kept waiting in EDs for an average of ten hours before receiving a hospital bed.

Not only is this a new record for the state, it's also two hours longer than the national average. Tasmania was the only state where patients spent longer in EDs.

Alarmingly, one in ten South Australian patients who were admitted to EDs were waiting more than 31 hours – almost a day and a half.

AMA SA President Dr John Williams has described the findings as extremely concerning.

'South Australia's public hospitals are failing some of the most vulnerable members of our community,' he says.

'Many of the patients represented in these figures are highly distressed and in need of urgent care.

'They should be treated in specialised mental health beds, not kept in overcrowded and stressful emergency departments for such extended periods of time.'

AMA's report card acknowledges that SA's mental health capacity is slowly increasing after a long-term downward trend.

It shows 45 extra specialised mental health beds were added to the system between 2017 and 2023 and the ratio of beds per 100,000 people is now slightly higher than the national average.

But it also shows the extra capacity is being counteracted by high patient loads. The number of mental health-related ED presentations in South Australia is decreasing but remains higher than the national average.

'What that demonstrates is there's an ongoing unmet need for community mental health services in the state,' Dr Williams says.

'Boosting capacity at hospitals is only part of the solution. Our governments must also fund alternatives for community care which keeps patients out of hospital.'

'Programs that work with GPs to address avoidable admissions and readmissions should be prioritised.

'The growing mental health burden on our hospitals will only become worse unless all levels of government work together to deliver additional resources and real reform.'

Dr Williams says the glimmer of good news in the report is that the rate of patients being provided with community follow-up within seven days of discharge from psychiatric admission is increasing across South Australia, in both metropolitan and remote areas.

'These follow-up checks are essential to ensure patients don't feel they've been cast adrift after leaving hospital,' he says.

'Ongoing and quality community care is required to help them from returning to hospital and again contributing to the crisis in our EDs.'

For more information or interview requests please contact Media and Communications Advisor Ben Terry on 0478 847 604.

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