

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## AMA report shows Australia's public hospitals remain under severe strain

Australians continue to face long waits for emergency care and essential surgery as the public hospital system struggles under sustained pressure, according to the Australian Medical Association's [2026 Public Hospital Report Card](#).

The report shows modest improvements in some areas, including a small reduction in the median wait time for planned surgery and an increase in the total number of public hospital beds. However, overall performance remains significantly worse than it was ten years ago, reflecting the impact of growing demand.

AMA President Dr Danielle McMullen said the report confirmed the system remains stretched beyond its limits, and it was unclear whether additional federal government funding in the new National Health Reform Agreement (NHRA) would be enough to reverse the decline in performance.

"After years of campaigning through our Clear the Hospital Logjam campaign the federal government announced an additional \$25 billion in funding for the new agreement and that is, of course, very welcome," Dr McMullen said.

"But our costings suggest it may not be enough to get our public hospitals out of the cycle of crisis they've been in.

"AMA modelling showed that at least \$34b was the type of investment required, with substantial additional investment needed from the states and territories, who oversee the day-to-day running of our public hospital system."

Dr McMullen said the report identified some modest improvements, but patients were still waiting too long for care and the gap between demand and capacity continues to grow.

Emergency departments remain under intense pressure nationwide. The proportion of patients completing their emergency department visit within four hours has fallen again to the lowest level on record, with just over half of patients now meeting the nationally agreed benchmark.

"Patients triaged as urgent include people with chest pain, severe breathing difficulties and life-threatening conditions like sepsis, and nearly one third of these patients are still not being seen on time, which is unacceptable," Dr McMullen said.

"Planned surgery performance remains deeply concerning. While median waiting times have fallen slightly for the second year in a row, Australians are still waiting far longer for surgery than they were a decade ago.

"The proportion of Category 2 patients treated within clinically recommended timeframes remains well below historical levels, and patients who miss those timeframes often wait months longer than advised. These are medically necessary procedures that prevent deterioration and improve quality of life."

A persistent capacity shortfall is at the heart of declining performance. Although more beds have been added in recent years, population growth has offset these gains. Bed availability per person has stagnated, and capacity for

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older Australians has fallen to the lowest level ever recorded, despite people aged 65 and over accounting for nearly half of all public hospital patient days.

Dr McMullen said it was vital the additional funding announced in January be used by states and territories to lift capacity and address exit block.

But she said without further reforms it may not be enough to turn things around, and more detail was needed on how the new agreement would achieve reform and reverse declining performance.

“For example, we used to fund performance improvement and to no-one’s surprise, performance improved. Then it was scrapped, and performance got worse.”

[Read the 2026 Public Hospital Report Card](#)

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