

**Australian Medical Association Limited**  
**ABN 37 008 426 793**

42 Macquarie Street, Barton ACT 2600: PO Box 6090, Kingston ACT 2604  
 Telephone: (02) 6270 5400 Facsimile (02) 6270 5499  
 Website : <http://www.ama.com.au/>



**“PROPERLY FUND OUR PUBLIC HOSPITALS” – AMA CALLS FOR AN ELECTION PROMISE THAT WILL HELP ALL AUSTRALIANS**  
*AMA 2019 Public Hospital Report Card*

The AMA is calling on all the major parties to make a meaningful election promise to commit to significant new long-term funding for Australia’s public hospitals should they win Government on 18 May.

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said that the latest AMA Public Hospital Report Card, released today, paints a depressing picture of overstretched hospitals and patients waiting longer for their care.

Dr Bartone said that the ability of the hospitals to cope with ever-increasing patient demand continues to decline, and it is a trend that will only accelerate unless something is done.

“Public hospitals are a vital pillar of our world-class health system, but neglect and underfunding are dooming them to failure,” Dr Bartone said.

“All our governments have to lift their game, but the leadership and the funding priorities and strategies must come from the Federal Government.

“Our public hospitals need clear and transparent long-term funding arrangements, above and beyond the current formulas.

“Emergency treatment times for ‘urgent’ patients have gone backwards in most States and Territories. None have performed substantially better than last year.

“The picture for elective surgery is not much better, with most jurisdictions performing worse or remaining static.

“Compared to last year, elective surgery admissions per 1,000 population actually went backwards by 1.5 per cent nationally, and backwards in every jurisdiction bar two.

“No jurisdiction improved performance across all indicators in our Report Card.

“The picture should be one of continual improvement. Sadly, it is not.

“This is not what our rapidly growing and ageing population deserves. It is certainly not a base to provide the level and amount of care needed for the increasing complex conditions the community will face in coming years,” Dr Bartone said.

In 2016-17, public hospitals provided more than 6.5 million episodes of admitted public hospital treatment; close to 8 million presentations to accident and emergency departments; and around 36.7 million non-admitted patient service events, including 16.2 million services in allied health and/or clinical nurse specialist clinics.

Key findings of the 2019 AMA Public Hospital Report Card include:

- Static bed ratios for the general population and a 24 year low of hospital beds per 1000 people aged 65 years and older.

- Longer waiting times for patients in emergency departments, with only 64 per cent of urgent presentations seen within the recommended 30-minute timeframe in 2017-18.
- Nationally, more than a third of the almost 3 million patients who presented to an emergency department in need of urgent treatment waited longer than clinically recommended.
- In three of the eight States and Territories, around one in five patients who need elective surgery within 90 days are waiting longer than clinically-recommended.

Dr Bartone said these are not the signs of a public hospital sector in good shape.

“Every year, the Australian population gets older and sicker,” Dr Bartone said

“It’s no surprise then that public hospitals are treating more patients each year. Between 2012-13 and 2016-17, public hospital separations rose on average 4.5 per cent per annum.

“The number of emergency presentations also rose on average by 2.6 per cent each year over the same period.

“Across all types of public hospital service, the rate of increased demand is outstripping the 1.6 per cent, per annum, rate of population growth.”

Dr Bartone said the consequences of underfunding are significant.

“Underfunding can lead to increased numbers of deaths for admitted patients, higher levels complications, delayed care, delayed pain relief, and longer length of stay for patients,” Dr Bartone said.

“Public hospital capacity is determined by funding.

“We can’t have a hospital system that is stretched so tight that scheduled elective surgery is cancelled because ward beds are needed by seriously ill patients who unexpectedly present in emergency.

“We can’t have a hospital system that is so under-resourced that primary health care doctors cannot find a hospital bed for their patients who need elective surgery.

“Greater funding is needed to lift the capacity of our hospitals.

“They need the resources to first slow the decline, before they can show significant performance improvements.

“Greater funding is needed to support the highly-skilled, dedicated, and hardworking doctors, nurses, other health professionals, and hospital workers who are asked to do more with less every day.

“And greater funding is needed to ensure that patients can get access to high-quality care when they need it, without long waiting times.”

The 2019 AMA Public Hospital Report Card is available at <https://ama.com.au/ama-public-hospital-report-card-2019>

## Background

- Our public hospitals are the first port of call for emergency care and intensive care.
  - They are the only place for the sickest of patients who arrive in an emergency who need intensive care or treatment for conditions such as life threatening burns or as a result of car accidents or falls.
  - Public hospitals are the only option for many Australians who live in rural and remote areas.
  - Public hospitals are the only option for the millions of Australians who don't have, or can't afford, private health insurance.
  - They are the training ground for the future medical workforce.
  - They are the centres where medical innovation is often developed, and where new treatments are carried out.
  - Public hospitals provide the non-admitted services needed by so many Australians - services such as diagnostics; allied health; chemotherapy; renal dialysis; radiation therapy; ophthalmology; obstetrics; and specialist outpatient consultations, rehabilitation and palliative care.
- 

20 April 2019

CONTACT:     John Flannery                     02 6270 5477 / 0419 494 761  
                  Maria Hawthorne                 02 6270 5478 / 0427 209 753

Follow the AMA Media on Twitter: [http://twitter.com/ama\\_media](http://twitter.com/ama_media)

Follow the AMA President on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/amapresident>

Follow *Australian Medicine* on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/amaausmed>

Like the AMA on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/AustralianMedicalAssociation>