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Private hospitals ready to help ease elective surgery backlog

New data shows elective surgery wait times continue to blow out as it resumes in New South Wales and Victoria.

The latest information from the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA) suggests 11,000 anticipated admissions were missing from private hospitals in the last quarter of 2021.

Australian Private Hospitals Association (APHA) Acting CEO Lucy Cheetham said the missing surgeries will take some time to work through.

“It is important to note that these numbers only include the very beginning of the Omicron wave in Australia and not elective surgery restrictions in place on the east coast until last month.

“It has been almost two years now of on/off elective surgery restrictions for private hospitals and the health system, that adds up to significant wait times for patients as surgery returns.

“Elective surgery, while not life threatening, is still necessary. It includes surgery like knee and hip replacements or cataract surgery. Making people wait for these surgeries means Australians are left managing pain, low quality of life and even difficulty seeing.”

Now that restrictions have eased in most states, Ms Cheetham said private hospitals will be working hard to address this backlog as quickly as possible.

“Just as when the pandemic hit and private hospitals stepped up to the mark to be part of the fight against COVID-19, the private sector will again help to ensure Australians get access to the care they need.”

Ms Cheetham said the need for more nurses in Australia is greater than ever as the health sector addresses pent up demand as highlighted in APHA’s [Federal Budget submission](#).

“Although special migration exemptions were granted for nurses joining the COVID-19 response, skilled migration is well below pre-pandemic levels. The high-level skills and experience these migrants bring supplements our own workforce and provides the support and supervision needed by new graduates as we welcome them into the hospital sector. The sector also needs relief from costs of sponsorship and the flexibility to deploy these highly skilled clinicians to where they are most needed.”

In addition, the APRA data shows an increase in Australians taking up private health insurance – a further 58,459 insured persons for hospital care over the quarter, Ms Cheetham said.

“However, today’s data also shows private health insurers continue to hold on to members’ funds in deferred claims liability – now standing at \$1.4 billion. Health funds reported profits of \$1.8 billion to the end of 2021, up 230 percent on the previous year. It is now incumbent on insurers to work with hospitals to ensure patients who have been waiting for treatment are able to receive the treatment they need.



Australian
Private Hospitals
Association



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