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Demand for private health care services back to 100%

Patient demand for consultations and treatments in Australian hospitals has rebounded over and above pre-COVID levels, according to the latest industry research by Members Health.

The final instalment of Members Health's eligibility checks study – a lead indicator of hospital referrals from specialist consultations – shows bookings for services have returned to 103 per cent of pre-pandemic levels.

“There was a noticeable lull in eligibility checks for non-urgent procedures as the COVID-19 restrictions on elective surgery took effect from March 21 to June 13,” said Members Health CEO Matthew Koce.

“But this round of data, along with already published evidence from Australia's largest private hospital operator shows convincingly that people are now returning for treatments and check-ups, which had to be delayed.”

Ramsay Health Care announced last week it was moving back towards 100 per cent of elective surgery capacity in all states as doctors and surgeons prepare for an expected influx of overdue procedures.

The latest eligibility checks data from Members Health, the peak body for 27 not-for-profit or member owned funds representing approximately 30 per cent market share or around 3.7 million insured Australians, backs up the hospital operator's assessment.

Eligibility checks for heart and vascular system procedures, gastrointestinal, psychiatric and bone, joint and muscle procedures all recovered to above 100 per cent by June 27, according to the study, which collated data from Members Health funds and was prepared by expert actuaries.

While eligibility checks dipped to 50 per cent of pre-COVID levels during the height of the crisis, the research also shows that vital care that cannot be delayed, such as for pregnancy and cancers, never stopped.

“Health funds kept their members covered throughout the pandemic for a many urgent and lifesaving procedures, including important cancer treatments like chemotherapy and immunotherapy, mental health and psychiatric services,” Mr Koce said.

“Australia's private hospitals are among the best in the world. Nurses, doctors and specialists have been working very hard to keep the flow of services during the pandemic to ensure Australians still get access to important treatments.”

“The private system takes pressure off public hospitals, freeing up beds for those that need them most, especially during a pandemic like COVID-19. With patient demand back up to 100 per cent, private hospitals and their staff will be working around the

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clock to make sure private patients receive the fastest available access to high quality care when they need it.”

Prior to the COVID-19 slowdown, public hospitals had seen consistent annual increases in the length of time and volume of people put on waiting lists for important elective surgeries. Analysts have predicted these public hospital wait times could balloon much further post COVID-19.

“It’s important that Australians continue to see their specialist or GP, and get quick access to health care. Many conditions requiring elective surgery can be disabling, painful and even life threatening,” Mr Koce said.

“Delayed access to care can result in dependence on opioid pain killers, increased complexity of surgery down the track and trigger all sorts of other health issues that further impact quality of life.”

Members Health is the peak industry body for an alliance of 27 health funds that are not-for-profit or part of a member-owned group, region or community. They all share the common ethic of putting their members’ health before profit and represent the interests of more than 3.7 million Australians.

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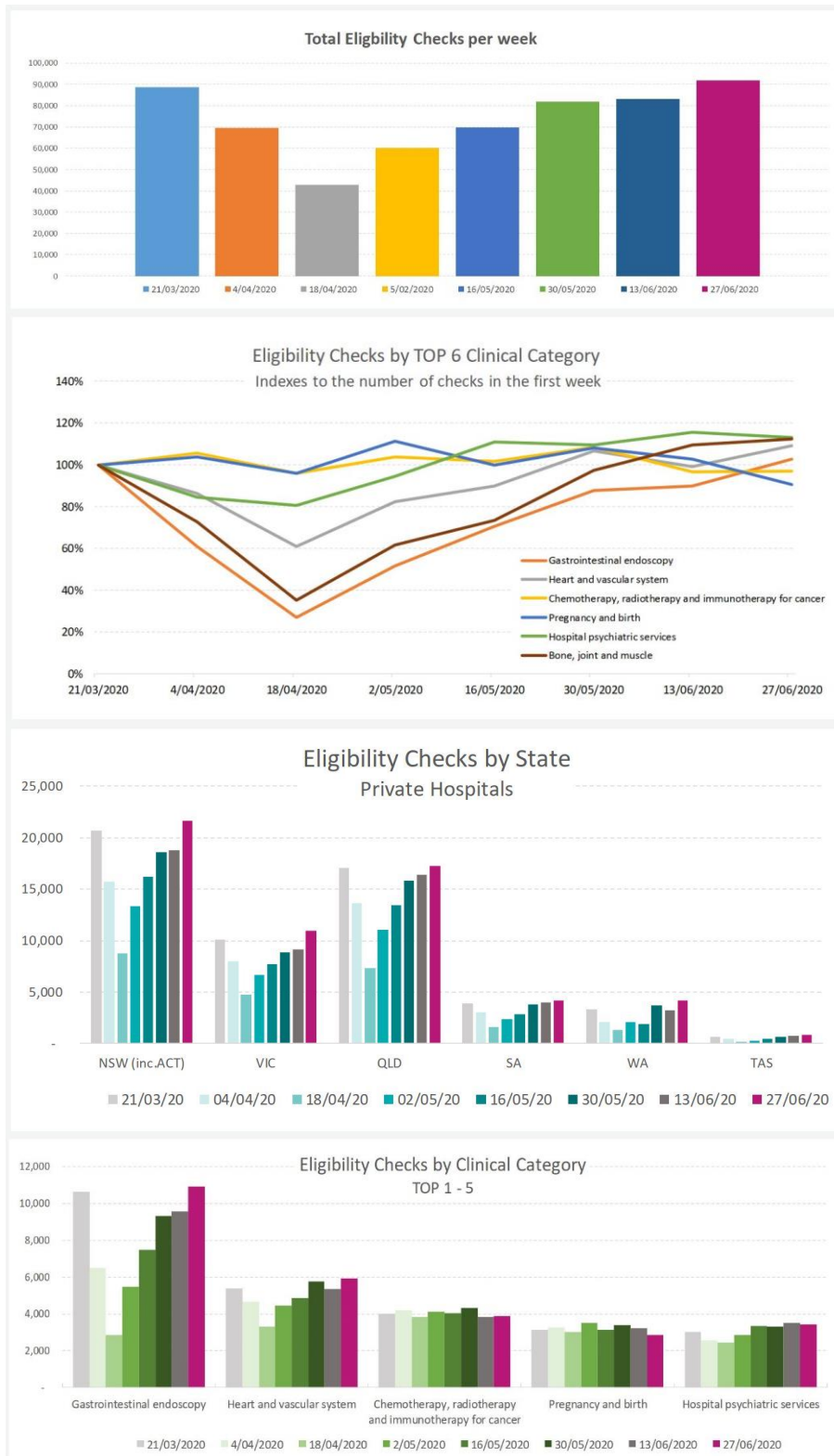
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Private Hospital Eligibility Checks

Members Health funds, representing approximately 30% PHI market share



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