

MEDIA RELEASE:

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Vaccinations hit 90%, time to stop acting like the Christmas Grinch and end private hospital restrictions

New data released by Members Health has highlighted the impact of ongoing Government restrictions on all Victorian private hospitals.

“Despite 90 per cent of all Victorians being fully vaccinated, the State Government continues to force harsh elective surgery restrictions on all privately owned hospitals, limiting them to 50 per cent of normal capacity,” said Members Health CEO Matthew Koce.

“It is heartbreaking that patients who need care are being turned away in the lead-up to Christmas. The Victorian Government is behaving like the Christmas Grinch.”

The latest research by Members Health, the peak body for Australia’s not-for-profit and member owned health insurers, revealed persistent declines in hospital eligibility checks for a range of serious health conditions.

By mid-November, eligibility checks for skin-related procedures, such as time-critical removal of skin cancers were down 13 per cent. Checks relating to kidney and bladder procedures dropped 28 per cent; gynaecology related checks decreased 31 per cent; gastrointestinal endoscopy checks declined 25 per cent; heart and vascular related checks fell 26 per cent; and bone, joint and muscle related checks dropped 41 per cent.

Cataracts were hit hardest, plummeting a massive 46 per cent from normal levels.

Eligibility checks are a leading indicator of current and future health care demand. Hospitals conduct checks with health insurers to determine patient eligibility to private health benefits prior to admission. Members Health’s research collated data from 22 individual health insurers covering over 3 million lives.

Mr Koce said the figures proved how damaging the Government’s restrictions are to the public’s general health and wellbeing.

“These figures should be sounding alarm bells across Spring Street,” he warned.

“The data we are seeing is unprecedented in Australia and signals an avalanche of complex and very serious health conditions on the way.

“The longer the Victorian Government locks down our private hospitals, the worse things will get for people’s health and wellbeing. Living in pain and on powerful medication, with the added uncertainty of not knowing when surgery is going to resume, is having a crushing impact on people’s mental health and on their quality of life.”

Mr Koce noted declines in critical cancer and skin treatments as particularly concerning for peoples’ health and the future demand on the health system.

“We are also extremely concerned that women might not getting timely treatment for endometriosis, which can be incredibly painful and debilitating if left untreated,” he said.

New South Wales has long removed all pandemic restrictions on providers of private health care services, and it is pleasing that checks for these important treatment areas are rebounding.

The Members Health CEO urged Victoria to learn from NSW and end the draconian restrictions so doctors and nurses can return to caring for their patients.

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“The Victorian people have led the world on vaccination rates. They have done the right thing. Now it is time the Victorian Government to follow suit and immediately end these unjustified restrictions on private day and overnight hospitals.

“After the year we’ve had and with vaccination rates now at 90 per cent, it is unfathomable that people are approaching Christmas and New Year still riddled with fear and uncertainty over whether they’ll receive the care they desperately need,” Mr Koce said.

| VICTORIA | Gastrointestinal endoscopy | Heart and vascular system | Hospital psychiatric services | Cataracts | Bone, joint and muscle | Kidney and bladder | Digestive system | Chemotherapy, radiotherapy and immunotherapy for cancer | Pain management | Skin | Gynaecology |
|--|----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|------------------------|--------------------|------------------|---|-----------------|------|-------------|
| Percentage of normal levels of checks (100%) | 75% | 74% | 82% | 54% | 59% | 72% | 75% | 94% | 77% | 87% | 69% |

Members Health is the peak industry body for an alliance of 26 health funds that are not-for-profit or part of a member-owned group, regional or community based. They all share the common ethic of putting their members’ health before profit. Our funds represent the interests of more than 4 million Australians.

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