

MEDIA RELEASE:

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Call to end all restrictions on elective surgery to give thousands of Victorians chance of a pain free Christmas

Australia's peak body for not-for-profit health insurers has urged the Victorian Government to scrap all elective surgery bans on private hospitals and allow much-needed access to healthcare in the run up to Christmas.

Members Health's most recent figures on hospital eligibility checks revealed a notable rebound in key elective surgery categories since restrictions on private hospitals and day surgeries were lifted from 50 to 75 per cent of capacity.

"More people are booking in for surgery as pandemic restrictions on private hospitals are eased but sadly we are a long way from catching up on demand," said Members Health CEO Matthew Koce.

"Demand for care won't be met as long as harsh Government restrictions stubbornly remain in place."

Eligibility checks for skin-related procedures, such as the removal of skin cancers rose from 79 per cent of normal levels at the end of October to 88 per cent by the end of November. Checks relating to gynaecology rebounded from 66 per cent to 89 per cent; gastrointestinal endoscopy checks increased from 75 per cent to 91 per cent, and heart and vascular related checks climbed from 89 per cent to 93 per cent.

Cataracts checks saw the biggest rebound, rocketing from 48 per cent back to 87 per cent of normal levels. Cancer treatment (chemotherapy, radiotherapy and immunotherapy) checks all returned to 100 per cent of normal levels.

The volume of surgery for bone, joint and muscle procedures presently sits at 80 per cent of normal levels, having rebounded from a low of 54 per cent at the end of October."

"The rebound in checks is a promising sign that as restrictions ease, the private health system is quickly responding to provide Victorians with as much care as the Government restrictions allow," Mr Koce said.

Mr Koce said the easing of restrictions to 75 per cent of normal capacity is a step in the right direction but there is still a long way to go.

"Delays in surgery can result in poorer long-term clinical outcomes and greater complexity. What we need to see is an immediate end to all restrictions so surgery volumes can return to 100 per cent, or above, normal levels."

"Languishing in pain, taking strong opioids or experiencing anxiety about when you might be able to get the care you need, is the last thing any of us would want to experience over the Christmas period."

"The government's ongoing pandemic restrictions on private hospitals and day surgeries is well past its used by date now that over 90 per cent of all Victorians are fully vaccinated against COVID-19."

Mr Koce said Victorians had done the right thing, being vaccinated in record numbers. New South Wales has long removed all pandemic restrictions on providers of private health care services.

"Now it is time the Victorian Government to lift all private hospital elective surgery restrictions to give people the chance of a pain-free Christmas."

Putting members' health before profit

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.

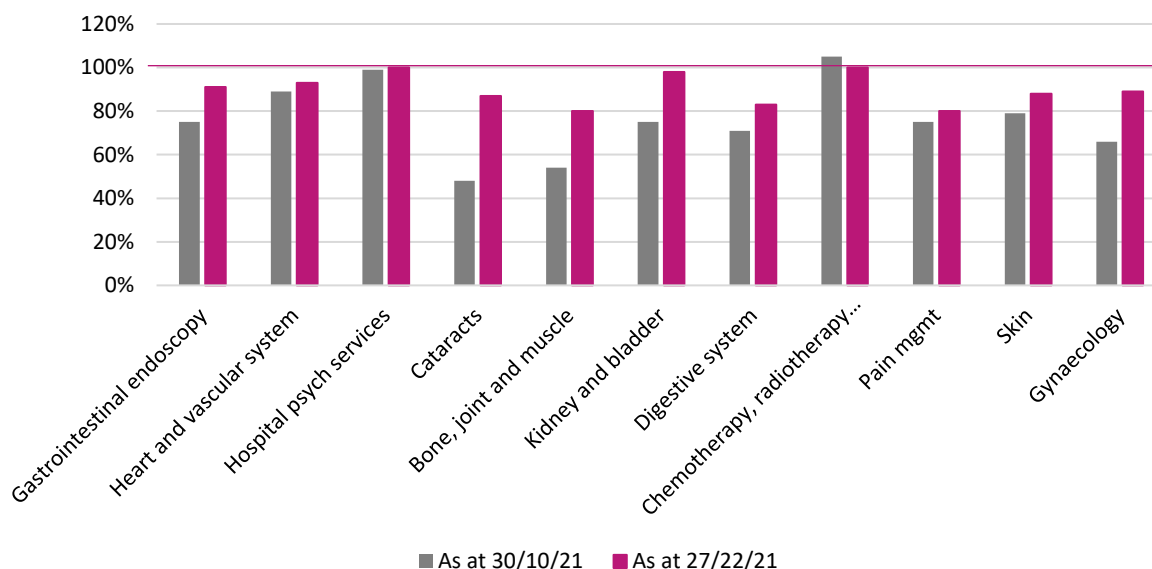
Members Health is the peak industry body for an alliance of 26 health funds that are not-for-profit or part of a member-owned group, regional or community based. They all share the common ethic of putting their members' health before profit. Our funds represent the interests of more than 3.7 million Australians.

Victoria Eligibility Checks at 27 November 2021

	Gastrointestinal endoscopy	Heart and vascular system	Hospital psych services	Cataracts	Bone, joint and muscle	Kidney and bladder	Digestive system	Chemotherapy, radiotherapy and immunotherapy for cancer	Pain mgmt	Skin	Gynaecology
As at 27/11/21	91%	93%	100%	87%	80%	98%	83%	100%	80%	88%	89%
As at 30/10/21	75%	89%	99%	48%	54%	75%	71%	105%	75%	79%	66%

Eligibility checks clinical categories - Victoria

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