

MEDIA RELEASE:

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Move to ease elective surgery restrictions in NSW welcomed. Time for Victoria to follow suit and give people the chance to be pain free

Members Health welcomes today's announcement of the staged return of elective surgery in New South Wales.

From Monday, 7 February non-urgent elective surgery requiring an overnight stay will return to 75 per cent capacity in private hospitals, and up to 75 per cent of pre pandemic activity levels at public hospitals in regional and rural NSW where they are able to do so.

"Private health insurance is vital to Australia's healthcare system and will be essential to addressing the backlog of necessary elective surgery," said Members Health CEO Matthew Koce.

"Over 14 million people or half the Australian population have health insurance. Around two-thirds of non-emergency procedures such as chemotherapy, radiotherapy and immunotherapy for cancer and joint replacements are performed in Australia's more than 600 private hospitals. This is in addition to the more than 93 million services such as dental, optical and physio supported by private health insurance during the last 12 months alone."

"Australia's uniquely mixed public and private health system achieves the best of both worlds, delivering better health outcomes at a lower cost to countries such as the USA and UK. But even for Australia, catching up on surgery delayed due to COVID will be a herculean task."

"According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) the median public hospital wait time for elective surgery has blown out, from 41 days pre COVID (2018-19) to 48 days in 2020-21. As of September 2021, elective surgery waiting lists in NSW had blown out to a staggering 92,000 with similar trends experienced across the country."

"It is highly likely the official data represents just the tip of the iceberg."

The AIHW predates the latest wave of surgery shutdowns and does not tell us how many Australians have put off medical appointments due to the fear and challenges of COVID."

"The true underlying demand for elective surgery could be grossly understated and set to explode, both in case numbers and complexity caused by delayed treatment."

"That has certainly been the experience in the US and elsewhere overseas, particularly for patients with chronic disease."

"The costs to public health of a protracted delay to a return to elective surgery are too great. It is time for Victoria to follow the lead of New South Wales and put in place a roadmap to end elective surgery restrictions as soon as possible."

"Languishing in pain, being unable to see due to cataracts, forced onto 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 for ourselves or our loved ones."

"The government's tough bans on surgery in private hospitals and day surgeries has gone on long enough. We are now past the peak of COVID-19 hospitalisations with Victorians getting double and triple vaccinated in record numbers."

"New South Wales is now easing its pandemic restrictions and Victoria should do the same to give people the chance to be pain free," Mr Koce said.

Putting members' health before profit



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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Putting members' health before profit

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