



Embargoed until Thursday, 24 May 2018

Evidence of public hospitals failing patients grows

The pile of damning evidence proving public hospitals are failing those they are supposed to care for continues to grow, with yet another report showing increasing numbers of the privately insured being prioritised over public patients, says Australian Private Hospitals Association (APHA) CEO Mr Michael Roff.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's (AIHW) "Admitted patient care 2016-17: Australian hospital statistics" report released today reveals public hospitals have not shied away from making a pretty penny out of privately insured patients, while forcing those on public waiting lists to do just that – wait.

"The latest data shows privately insured patients continue to jump the queue in public hospitals. The median wait time for elective surgery for a public patient is 42 days. That's twice as long as the privately insured who wait a median of 21 days," Mr Roff said.

"This comes hard on the heels of Australian Prudential Regulation Authority's March quarter health insurance figures that detail a four percent increase in privately insured patients treated in public hospitals.

"The increasing reliance on private health insurance funds in the public hospital setting is showing no sign of abating, despite the obvious pressure it places on public waiting lists and impact on premiums. There were almost a million privately insured separations in public hospitals in 2016-17 – that's a 4.6 percent increase on the previous 12 months, an average increase of 7.4 percent every year since 2012-13.

"The AIHW data show one in seven public admissions were for privately insured patients – that's 14 percent of all admissions to public hospitals," he said.

Mr Roff said removing the \$1.5 billion impost on private health insurance would immediately reduce health insurance premiums by as much as six percent. A win for public hospital waiting lists and the privately insured, but the public system is addicted to the cash grab.

"The evidence is piling up that public hospitals are willfully contributing to long waiting times for their public patients who pay the price, living with reduced quality of life while they wait for surgery.

Mr Roff said some specialty areas saw patients worse off than others.

"Public patients waiting for a total knee replacement spend about seven months waiting for surgery, but those with private health insurance are fast-tracked in after a little over two months. Those waiting for cataract extraction spent more than three and a half times longer than the privately insured – 109 days versus 30 days.

"The evidence against public hospitals continues to build and it's well past time they started putting patients, not profits, first," Mr Roff said.

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