



Wednesday, 27 March 2019

Queensland bed block disaster a matter of private in public

The Queensland Government's insistence on pressuring privately insured patients to hand over their health fund benefits to public hospitals has come back to bite, with the announcement today of a \$3 million injection in funds to ease emergency and elective surgery lists – by paying private hospitals to treat public patients.

Australian Private Hospitals Association (APHA) CEO Michael Roff said the situation is entirely of the State Government's own making.

"Private hospitals are always willing to help out, that's what we do, but the reality is that if public hospitals weren't so blinded by the idea of making an extra dollar or two out of the privately insured, there would be enough beds for everyone.

"It is a cruel irony that Queensland Health is turning to private hospitals to treat public patients who can't get a public hospital bed because they are full of private patients.

"Queensland has been increasing its reliance on privately insured patients treated in public hospitals. There were 134,000 private admissions in public hospitals in 2018. This means one in ten public hospital beds is being taken up by privately insured patients every year.

"Federal Health Minister Greg Hunt wrote to Queensland Health Minister Steven Miles a week ago asking them to stop this practice in the interest of patients, it should come as no surprise this is the situation Mr Miles finds himself in today," Mr Roff said.

In his letter, Mr Hunt called for the end of 'harvesting' vulnerable patients at the time of admission, saying this was contributing to waiting list pressure and was 'unethical and inappropriate'.

Mr Roff said there was a mounting case for the practice to stop as private patients queue jump to the head of public hospital waiting lists, instead of being treated in order of need.

"Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) data from less than a year ago shows privately insured patients are being prioritised ahead of public patients. This goes against the principles of Medicare – access to care based on clinical need, not insurance status.

"With its focus on making a buck, the Queensland Government has lost sight of its public hospitals' main focus – to provide much needed health services to public patients," Mr Roff said.

- ENDS -

Media contact: Frith Rayner, Director Communications and Marketing: 0413 971 999