



15 November 2019

## No excuse for Victorian elective surgery blow out

The Victorian Health Minister has 'no excuse' for allowing a budget cut that will lead to a blow out in elective surgery waiting times in the state, says Australian Private Hospitals Association (APHA) CEO Michael Roff.

Commenting on reports in today's Herald Sun that suggested at least one hospital will face a 98 percent jump in its elective surgery waiting lists as a result of the cut, Mr Roff said public hospitals had created a rod for their own backs.

"Despite seasonal factors like a bad flu season, public hospitals still actively pursued privately insured patients rather than prioritising the public need.

"Victorian public hospitals are continuing to recruit privately insured Australians to use their private health benefits in the public system. In turn, the public hospital puts them ahead of the waiting list for public patients who have no other means to access health care.

"About one in eight Victorian public hospital beds are occupied by privately insured patients. In year ending 30 June 2019, there was a minuscule reduction of 0.8 percent in health insurance benefits collected by Victorian public hospitals compared to the previous year, indicating collecting private revenue is still the priority, not public patient need."

"If the Victorian Health Minister was serious about ensuring public patients were not disadvantaged, she should have demanded that public hospitals transfer insured patients to the private sector so waiting lists did not blow out during periods of increased seasonal demand.

Mr Roff said that the Victorian public hospital system is so addicted to private patient revenue they are willing to let public patients suffer on ever increasing waiting lists to feed their addiction, rather than putting patients first.

"But it's not just me saying it. Victoria's own Auditor General identified this as an issue in June, prompting a review. The report highlighted a perverse set of circumstances where Department of Health and Human Services' policy settings have led to practices against the interests of an efficient system and put patients last.

"This practice has become the norm across many states and it is Australia's public patients who are suffering as a result," he said.

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The Australian Private Hospitals Association (APHA) is the peak industry body representing the private hospital and day surgery sector. The private hospital sector treats 4.5 million patients a year, including treatment of a third of chemotherapy, 60 percent of all surgery, 74 percent of all elective musculoskeletal surgery and 80 percent of rehabilitation.