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Patients the priority in elective surgery reboot

Patient safety and wellbeing is central to the staged return to elective surgery agreed today by the National Cabinet, says Australian Private Hospitals Association's (APHA) CEO Michael Roff.

"Private hospitals welcome the controlled return of elective surgery, which must be conducted so patients, health care workers and other hospital staff are as safe as possible. A phased reintroduction will allow hospitals to minimise risk to patients, monitor use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and ensure we maintain capacity in the system to address the pandemic if it is required.

"We must acknowledge the great work already done in the health care system and by Australians in flattening the curve and putting governments in a position to allow the reintroduction of some elective procedures.

"We agree with the National Cabinet's approach and look forward to resuming surgeries that will have a dramatic effect on the quality of life for many Australians," Mr Roff said.

Mr Roff stressed the importance of access to PPE to ensure safety of patients and health care workers and that the use of PPE is appropriate to the procedure, in accordance with nationally developed guidelines.

"Access to PPE is going to be a critical issue for return to elective surgery and if normal supply chains are not restored soon, private hospitals will need to be given access either to government supply chains or to the national stockpile to ensure they can provide care safely.

"For a nationally consistent approach surgical restrictions need to be eased across the private and public hospitals at the same rate. This is to ensure equity of access to available services for patients on public elective waiting lists, in addition to privately insured patients.

"We must work together, going forward, to ensure Australians are able to get the care they need and our health workforce has the PPE needed to provide that care in a safe environment," 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.