

MEDIA RELEASE

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Upsetting the balance of Australia's dual health system

Catholic Health Australia (CHA) welcomes today's release by the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare of a detailed report on the utilisation of private health insurance in all Australian Hospitals using data from 2006 to 2016.

The report shows that an increase of private health insurance funded hospitalisations in public hospitals has occurred across all Australian states, but was particularly significant in Queensland where the proportion increased between 2006 to 2016 from 4.8% to 15.4%.

"Whilst CHA absolutely supports the right of privately insured patients to use public hospital services as a fundamental feature of Australia's health system, we also reject a system that could disadvantage public patients or undermine the efficacy of the public hospital network on which low income and vulnerable Australians are fully reliant", says Catholic Health Australia's CEO Suzanne Greenwood.

"This report is another step towards better transparency for consumers with detailed information available state by state on waiting times for public hospital admissions for elective surgery. The report shows that patients with private health insurance generally experience shorter than average waiting times for elective surgery in all states. On average this is 20 days compared to 42 days for public patients."

"Greater transparency is needed to enforce compliance with the Medicare principles of universality of care, so that private patients in public hospitals do not receive preferential access to services in a public hospital setting, and that the only driver for prioritising treatment is the nature of a person's clinical condition".

"CHA believes that all patients must be given the right to make a fully informed choice about their treatment, and that funding mechanisms do not create incentives to discriminate between patients in public hospitals based upon private health insurance utilisation", said Mrs Greenwood.

"CHA supports maintaining the balance of Australia's dual and interdependent hospital system to ensure equity of access to health services and the stewardship of appropriate distribution of health care resources".

Catholic Health Australia represents Australia's largest non-government grouping of hospitals, aged and community care services, providing approximately 10 per cent of hospital and aged care services in Australia, including around 30 per cent of private hospital care as well as approximately 5 per cent of public hospital care.