

MEDIA RELEASE

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Auditor-General assesses performance of Tasmania's four major hospitals' Emergency Departments

Auditor-General Rod Whitehead has found Tasmania's hospital system is not working effectively to meet the growing demand for Emergency Department (ED) care, inpatient beds and associated performance obligations for ED access and patient flow.

The report into the effectiveness of Tasmania's four major hospitals in the delivery of ED services has made 10 recommendations for improving the quality and timeliness of emergency care.

Mr Whitehead said inefficiency across the system was partly due to capacity constraints, particularly at the RHH which is undergoing redevelopment, but also because of longstanding weaknesses within hospitals impeding effective discharge planning, bed management and coordination between EDs and inpatient areas.

"These challenges increase the risks for patients and staff and are preventing the EDs of Tasmania's four major hospitals from operating efficiently and effectively," Mr Whitehead said.

"Successive reviews over the last decade have highlighted dysfunctional silos, behaviours, process barriers and resistance to change from some clinicians and administrators as the major drivers of these inefficiencies."

"These issues mainly lie outside of EDs but are within the control of hospital leadership teams and are yet to be addressed."

"The patient journey through Tasmania's four major EDs as a result, has become more challenging over the last decade for both patients and ED staff."

Findings included:

- Ambulance ramping across Tasmania's four major hospitals increased significantly between 2012-13 and 2017-18 by around 149 per cent, far exceeding the 20 per cent growth in ambulance presentations to EDs over the same period.
- The RHH was significantly bed blocked for almost 93 per cent of the time between June 2018 and January 2019, with patient safety severely and routinely compromised almost once every four days on average. The LGH similarly spent more than 70 per cent of the time during this period at the highest possible level of escalation and in a state of almost constant 'gridlock'.
- Patients are increasingly waiting longer in EDs for treatment, with THS's performance against timeliness KPIs deteriorating markedly over the last five years due to worsening performance at the RHH and LGH.
- The rate of ED adverse events grew significantly between 2015 and 2018, increasing by around 60 per cent, with most events occurring at the RHH and LGH.

Mr Whitehead noted the Government had recognised these challenges and introduced significant reforms to the Tasmanian health system in 2018 aimed at improving governance and THS's performance.

"As these changes are in the early stages of implementation they cannot yet be reliably assessed," Mr Whitehead said.

He concluded urgent action was needed to leverage these reforms and further strengthen whole-of-hospital and system-wide leadership, coordination and accountability for addressing the long-standing barriers to improve patient flow.

The complete Report can be downloaded from www.audit.tas.gov.au.

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