

MEDIA RELEASE
28 SEPTEMBER 2020

CATHOLIC HOSPITALS PUSH FOR HEALTH REFORM TO UNLOCK FUNDING TO ENABLE MORE TREATMENT IN THE HOME

A major new report from Catholic Health Australia is calling on the Federal Government to unlock funding to allow more Australians to be treated in the comfort of their own home.

The report, *Out of Hospital Care in Australia – Advancing Health’s Missing Sector*, finds current funding mechanisms prevent many private health patients from accessing hospital level care in their home for services such as renal dialysis, mental health, post-natal services, palliative care, and chemotherapy.

The report’s authors say there is demand for more out of hospital care and it would present a better option for many patients. But, any increase in OOH services must not come at the expense of standards of care.

"Far too many people are going into hospital every year for care that could be delivered in the comfort of their own home," says James Kemp, CHA's Director of Health policy.

"High quality care can be delivered safely and effectively at home. We just need the private health insurance industry and the government to work cooperatively on reform that will allow more people to enjoy the benefits.

"However, it's essential that out of hospital care does not turn into the poor cousin of in-hospital care. We need patients to be able to trust that the care they receive is the same as in-hospital care, and for this we need national standards on out of hospital care and to track the care provided."

The report says changes to the Private Health Insurance Act 2007 are needed in order to shift more patients to out of hospital care, as current laws require complex individual contacts between the insurer and the hospital. Private health insurers are also prohibited from funding out of hospital services to non-admitted patients.

Mr Kemp says: "Today, for medically stable patients, treatment at home can often be more efficient and effective than traditional in-patient care. Our report shows out of hospital care can lower hospital readmission rates and increase patient satisfaction. We therefore need to ensure money starts to flow beyond hospital walls and into the community.

"This could be a game changer for the frail and elderly who often struggle in the hospital system and experience both physical and mental decline.

"A stronger focus on out of hospital options could also radically change end of life care. Around half of all Australians die in hospital, but we know most people would like to spend their final days at home, surrounded by loved ones. Implementing the recommendations in our report will mean this option can start to be provided consistently, and to more people, by specialist palliative care teams."

CHA, the peak body representing major private hospitals –including Mater in Brisbane and St Vincent’s in Sydney – estimates the private health system has the capacity to treat between five and ten percent of its patients at home. This could result in an extra 200,000 patients receiving OOH care.

"COVID-19 has shown the system can move quickly by accommodating and expanding telehealth in record time. There’s no reason we cannot do the same with out of hospital care," Mr Kemp said.

"This is the next frontier of health service improvement for Australia and we call on the Commonwealth Government, health insurers, and other stakeholders to work with us to make it a reality."

Media contact Julia Timms 0457 517355 julia@hortonadvisory.com.au