

NSW residents rate healthcare system - elective surgery a key concern

- *New research conducted by SEC Newgate and commissioned by the Johnson & Johnson Family of Companies in Australia reveals **the quality of the healthcare system remains a top concern for NSW residents, out rating issues such as climate change, jobs, and unemployment.***
- *A majority surveyed **opposed the decision to suspend elective surgery in the last Omicron outbreak.***
- *Latest Bureau of Health Information quarterly data shows more than 94,000 NSW patients waiting for elective surgery. **The same data also reveals waiting times for semi-urgent elective surgery were the longest of any quarter since BHI began reporting in 2010.***
- *With Australia's first flu season in three years fast approaching and the ongoing risk posed by COVID-19 variants, there is real risk for future elective surgery suspensions.*
- *Medical experts, industry and healthcare providers have shared a range of solutions to ensure patients don't miss out on receiving essential treatment with these plans to be shared with government.*

23 March 2022, Sydney: One of the incidental consequences of the latest Omicron wave has been delays in elective surgery as more than 94,000 NSW patients wait to be seen for a range of preventable and painful illnesses.

New research released today shows the quality of the healthcare system remains a top issue for thousands of NSW residents, with **more than 80% surveyed naming it as a major concern – outranking climate change, education, personal safety, jobs, and unemployment.**

While the performance of nurses and frontline staff ranked number one, residents surveyed were more concerned about the waiting times for elective surgery and disagreed with the decision to suspend non-urgent surgery during the latest Omicron outbreak.

Of the 2,000 NSW residents surveyed, the research also showed:

- **An overwhelming majority believe COVID-19 will continue to be a significant issue for our healthcare system to manage over the next two years, with some believing it could take up to five years for the system to recover.**
- **Nearly half identify COVID-19 as having had a negative impact on their mental health with more than a third also believing it has negatively impacted their overall health.**
- Those who rated the performance of elective surgery as very poor and poor were also more likely to be accessing the healthcare system, including people with a medical condition and those aged over 55 years.
- 90% said they would be extremely or quite concerned both for themselves and for their friends and family if an elective surgery was to be delayed by three months.
- **More than 80% stated they felt the healthcare system should be better resourced** in the future to enable elective surgeries to continue if another outbreak was to occur.
- Residents strongly supported a range of alternative initiatives to reduce pressure on the **healthcare system including increasing the number of critical care beds.**
- **Almost 9 in 10 people supported or strongly supported dedicated resources being set aside for elective surgeries and maintaining a “surge capacity” in the healthcare system to respond to future emergencies as effective measures to reduce pressure on the healthcare system.**

Johnson & Johnson MedTech ANZ Managing Director, and former nurse, Sue Martin said the results reflected what many GPs and surgeons have been telling the healthcare industry and decision makers for months – pausing elective surgery is not sustainable.

“Elective surgery doesn’t mean unnecessary surgery – it includes essential procedures that remove cancers, alleviate pain and prevent deterioration of a patient’s condition. These procedures get people moving, back to work and living a full and vibrant life again,” Ms Martin said.

“The government made the difficult decision to suspend elective surgeries and we praise them for their hard work to get through the current backlog. However, we want to ensure this lever is never pulled again in the event of another outbreak which is expected again in the coming weeks.

“With our first flu season in three years fast approaching, now is the time for the health sector to work together to find solutions and ensure patients waiting for surgery are seen in a timely manner.”

McKell Institute CEO Michael Buckland said it was pleasing to see the Australian Medical Association, Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, Catholic Health Australia and Johnson & Johnson MedTech ANZ come together on this urgent issue.

“Through an urgent discussion held this week, the industry was able to chart a way forward in partnership with government to better manage elective surgery in times of crisis, creating better health outcomes for patients,” Mr Buckland said.

Action items discussed and put forward for implementation include:

- a coordinated resource plan between public and private hospitals to keep surgery going as much as possible;
- Having a dedicated fund and national workforce supply plan;
- Establishing COVID designated hospitals;
- Reassessing current traditional care practices;
- Utilising new technologies.

Mr Buckland said no government takes the suspension of any surgery lightly and the healthcare industry was committed to working together as the system recovers.

“The long-term impact of pausing non-urgent elective surgery is the deterioration of non-urgent health issues leading to urgent health issues, decreased health outcomes for patients and further strain on our healthcare system,” he said.

“Industry leaders from the health sector are united in their calls for action and have used their collective expertise and shared key learnings from the pandemic to help implement sensible public policy changes to inform future practices.”

The Johnson & Johnson Family of Companies in Australia commissioned SEC Newgate Research to conduct a new piece of social research to explore the impact of COVID-19, and related policies, on the health of the NSW community and related behaviours.

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Background:

Elective surgery is essential and includes:

- endoscopy and colonoscopy procedures
- joint replacements such as hips and knees replacements
- screening programs for cancer and other diseases
- IVF procedures
- post-cancer reconstruction procedures including mastectomies
- eye procedures and cataracts, and dental surgeries including temporary fillings, extractions and other preventive procedures.

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