

Thursday 6 May 2010

## **HOSPITAL EMERGENCY DATA TO BE PUBLICLY AVAILABLE**

**Victorian Coalition plan to give Victorians real-time access to key hospital performance information.**

**Plan will increase transparency of reporting by Victorian hospital emergency departments and end Labor's culture of cover-up.**

A Victorian Liberal Nationals Coalition Government will overhaul access to information about Victorian hospitals by requiring data on the performance of our public hospital emergency departments (EDs) to be made publicly accessible online in real time.

For the first time ever Victorians will be able to monitor from their homes how many people are waiting in the ED of their local hospital, current waiting times, and whether ambulances are being accepted or sent away from the hospital.

Victorians deserved to know the truth about their hospitals and should be able to compare the performance of different EDs.

The Brumby Government's record of cover-up and manipulation of hospital waiting lists means it cannot be trusted to tell Victorians the truth about our hospitals.

Last year the Auditor-General found that important data used to assess hospital performance, allocate funds, and report to government and the public on ED performance were flawed because of the Brumby Government's data manipulation.

A Coalition Government will end the cover-up and manipulation and be open and accountable with Victorians by making key performance data for emergency departments available to the public via a website.

Hospital EDs help vulnerable Victorians facing critical health risks, so ED performance is critical to patient confidence and all Victorians.

Our overhaul of reporting and transparency means Victorians will be able to view and assess for themselves the performance of their local hospital ED and hospital EDs across the state, which will inform their personal health decisions.

# Policy

The website will make available for the first time key hospital performance data in real time including:

- ED attendances by urgency (triage) category;
- ED attendances and median waiting time;
- ED admissions;
- current ED activity;
- a weekly ED activity report;
- the number of ED patients with a length of stay greater than 24 hours;
- the number of mental health patients waiting longer than 8 hours in the ED for admission;
- ambulance attendances;
- ambulance diversions, including both ambulance bypass and Hospital Early Warning System (HEWS) incidences; and
- the number of ambulance “ramping” occasions and ramping in hours (“ramping” occurs when a patient has to wait in the ambulance at the hospital because there are no free beds in the hospital).

Data will be available from all Victorian public hospitals which are currently included in the *Your Hospitals* report.

Other states such as Western Australia had already introduced such websites – see <http://www.health.wa.gov.au/emergencyactivity/home/> – and there was no reason that Victorians should not benefit from such transparency.

The website would be fully operational by June 2011 with an initial budgetary commitment of \$4 million over four years.

The website would be administered by the Department of Health with daily data updates in addition to real time information such as whether the hospital was on by pass.

It’s time to end the hiding of key statistics and important information about the performance of our public hospital emergency departments which is par for the course under John Brumby,” Mr Baillieu said.

The Auditor-General’s *Access to Public Hospitals: Measuring Performance* report in April 2009 stated that:

*'Open and transparent reporting is fundamental to making a fair assessment of performance and accountability'* but also pointed out that the Brumby Government's *'method chosen for presenting performance over time against the emergency access indicators [in the Your Hospitals report] does not provide the reader with a readily accessible view of performance trends'*.

The Auditor-General also found *'Given that access indicators are a core part of the accountability framework under which hospitals operate, it is most concerning that the audit found fundamental flaws both with data accuracy and the rigour of data capture processes ... Unfortunately, it is one of the findings of this audit that the reliability of access performance data by public hospitals cannot be assured ... Your Hospitals is also limited in that it excludes ... the indicator measuring waits of more than 24 hours in the emergency department. These indicators report against experiences the public can readily understand and are useful in presenting a comprehensive picture of health system performance'*.

In addition, the Brumby Government has never declared ambulance ramping data, with the only available data being released by the Ambulance Employees Union and widespread reports of ambulance ramping being swept under the carpet by John Brumby and Health Minister Daniel Andrews.

The Brumby Government has also refused to release Hospital Early Warning System data because it would be embarrassing for Labor, with the only HEWs data in the public domain included in the Auditor-General's May 2004 report entitled *Managing emergency demand in public hospitals* and information recently provided by Ambulance Victoria to the Upper House health inquiry.

The Coalition plan will improve measurement of access to emergency care by ambulances as recommended in the Auditor General's report, which noted: *'The ability of patients, transported by ambulance, to access the most appropriate hospital quickly can be a matter of life or death'*. The Coalition plan will reflect the Auditor-General's call to *'address the need to measure hospital performance in both their ability to be available to ambulance arrivals, as well as the timeliness with which they accept patients arrived by ambulance'*.

The Council of Australian Governments has called for greater transparency in health system reporting and accountability and the Coalition's plan would significantly improve the openness and accountability of Victoria's emergency departments and their responsiveness to the Victorian community.

Our plan will improve patient knowledge and choice and provide greater accountability and integrity and is an important first step in restoring integrity to the Victorian health system after years of Labor spin and deception.

# Policy

This website and the data available from it form part of a serious commitment by the Coalition to improve the integrity, reliability and accuracy of health information and data accessible by the Victorian public.

Victorian taxpayers deserve the truth about our hospitals instead of more deception from a self-serving manipulative Labor Government.