

**Question on Notice**  
**No. 245**  
**Asked on 1 March 2017**

MR J KELLY asked the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services (HON C R DICK) –

Will the Minister advise the impact the Federal Government's Medicare rebate freeze is having on emergency room presentations in Queensland public hospitals?

ANSWER:

I thank the Honourable Member for Greenslopes for his question.

Queensland Health's public hospital system provides quality emergency care services across the State to people who are seriously injured or ill and need immediate treatment. This quality care is part of the Queensland Government's commitment to ensuring residents and visitors have easy access to medical treatment when needed.

No one seeking assistance from an emergency department (ED) is refused care, however people with less severe illnesses or injuries may have to wait longer for treatment than people with more urgent medical needs.

Between 2014-15 and 2015-16, Queensland's public hospital EDs saw an increase of 50,000 presentations.

The factors contributing to increased ED presentations are multifactorial and inter-related, including a growing and ageing population, changes in chronic disease profiles, affordability and access to health care services. However, it is expected that the continued freeze on indexation of the Medicare rebate has contributed to these increases through a reduction in the availability of bulk-billing general practitioners (GP). Patients who are subsequently unable to pay for care at their general practitioner may delay or avoid treatment, which exacerbates their condition, ultimately leading to an increase in the number of people accessing care through public hospital EDs.

Despite this increase in ED presentations, Queensland's performance with regard to the proportion of patients with an ED length of stay of less than four hours has significantly improved since 2011-12, with 75% of patients admitted or discharged within four hours in 2015-16.

Queensland Health is about to launch its yearly 'keep emergency for emergencies' campaign, as a reminder that many patients presenting to EDs with minor conditions could be treated elsewhere, such as by a GP. If patients requiring treatment for minor conditions instead went to a GP, this would enable EDs to focus on patients with more severe illnesses or injuries. As indicated above, Queensland Health's position on ED presentations is that no-one seeking assistance from an ED is refused care; although people with less severe illnesses or injuries may have to wait longer for treatment than people with more urgent medical needs.