

## Question on Notice

No. 1209

Asked on 11 December 2024

**MR N DAMETTO** ASKED MINISTER FOR HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH AND AMBULANCE SERVICES (HON T NICHOLLS)—

### QUESTION

With reference to Elderly patients in the Hinchinbrook Electorate reporting unacceptable wait times of up to four weeks for emergency dental appointments through the public health system—

Will the Minister advise (a) what are the current average wait times for dental appointments in public hospitals across Queensland and (b) what specific measures are being implemented to address and reduce wait times at the Ingham Hospital?

### ANSWER

(a) What are the current average wait times for dental appointments in public hospitals across Queensland?

Hospital and health service (HHS) oral health services provide both emergency and general dental care for eligible patients. The waiting time for a dental appointment varies depending on the clinical urgency of the care required.

**Emergency dental care** is provided to address acute and urgent dental problems. Most public dental patients are triaged using a standardised questionnaire and then categorised based on clinical urgency. Care is offered according to clinically recommended maximum waiting times for each category, which range from 24 hours for cases of trauma and facial swelling, up to one month for lost fillings or broken teeth not causing any pain.

Statewide, in November, 81 per cent of public dental patients who were triaged with urgent dental problems causing pain (codes 3a and 3bc) received an emergency appointment within the recommended maximum waiting times of five and 10 days respectively. The percentage of patients treated within the clinically recommended timeframe for acute and urgent dental problems has remained relatively stable over the last 12 months.

**General dental care** is provided to patients who require non-urgent dental care. There are several types of waiting lists for HHS oral health services and patients are allocated to a waiting list according to their clinical need and urgency. Treatment is offered based on the order in which they are placed on a waiting list.

The general waiting list is for patients who require a routine dental checkup. The recommended timeframe for a patient to be seen on the general waiting list is within two years. As at 30 September 2024, 131,638 patients were on the general care waiting list, of which 99.8 per cent were waiting within two years.

Information about public dental waiting lists is published quarterly on the Queensland Health Hospital Performance website, with the most recent data showing July to September 2024.

(b) What specific measures are being implemented to address and reduce wait times at the Ingham Hospital?

At a local level, each HHS oral health service determines what strategies are implemented to address dental waiting times, including:

- offering existing oral health staff overtime;
- employing additional oral health staff; and/or,
- issuing dental vouchers for private dental care.

Specifically in relation to Townsville HHS (including Ingham), when capacity exceeds demand, dental vouchers are issued for private providers at no cost to patients to ensure they receive care within clinically recommended wait times.

Townsville HHS encourages patients who believe they are waiting outside their designated waiting time to get in touch with their local clinic and/or submit a complaint via the patient feedback portal.

At a statewide level, on 17 December 2024, Queensland Health launched the first ever Statewide Oral Health Services Plan focused on improving the oral health of Queenslanders. The plan aims to strengthen prevention initiatives, support our public oral health workforce and improve access to public oral health services.