

2021

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO RESOLUTION OF THE
ASSEMBLY 22 APRIL 2021
ENDOSCOPY SERVICES - WAIT TIMES**

**Presented by
Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA
Minister for Health
8 October 2021**

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This Government Response outlines work being undertaken to address the waiting times for public Endoscopy Services as required by an ACT Legislative Assembly motion on 22 April 2021.

A complete audit of the public Endoscopy Services waiting list has commenced and is expected to be completed in December 2021. This will provide better information about the current wait situation.

Data as of 30 September 2021, shows the total waiting that are ready for care in Category 1 is 1959, in Category 2 there are 1810 and in Category 3 there are 3803 patients waiting.

The number of Category 3 patients waiting for an endoscopy is due to the combination of volume and the priority placed on Urgent, Category 1 and Category 2 patients where clinical need is higher to receive an endoscopy. The median wait for all patients who have had an endoscopy is 63 days, based on the last three years and includes all categories of patients.

The audit has involved contacting all patients who are currently waiting for an endoscopy as well as an outpatient appointment. It covers all categories of patients; Category 1, Category 2 and Category 3. All Category 1 patients who are contacted and ready for care are being booked to a procedure time and date.

Audits previously conducted on Canberra Health Services' (CHS) Ambulatory Waitlist in the last two years have had a removal rate of approximately 30 per cent and the same is expected from this audit. As of 24 September 2021, the audit removal rate is 58 per cent of patients successfully contacted.

Patients may no longer require treatment for a variety of reasons – for example, they may have had their treatment elsewhere, or several referrals may have been received for the same patient. In addition, some patients have previously declined treatment at a given time for a variety of reasons, which impacts the overall waiting times.

The ACT receives approximately 150 referrals per week via the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (NBCSP). This is in addition to routine referrals from General Practitioner's which does impact overall wait times. All patients who are referred for the NBCSP are categorised as Urgent or Category 1. Those requiring an urgent endoscopy are immediately booked, with a maximum of eight weeks from receipt of referral to procedure. The NBCSP Key Performance Indicator of being seen <100 days is currently being met by CHS.

Several initiatives are being developed and employed to address the waiting times across all categories.

The ACT Government will undertake feasibility and design work for expansion and refurbishment of the existing endoscopy suites at the Canberra Hospital and Calvary Public Hospital Bruce, and will also support an immediate capacity increase to endoscopy services in 2021-22.

This initiative builds on the investment made in 2020-21 to increase endoscopy procedures as part of the recovery activity of the COVID-19 Response by including a one-off provision in 2021-22 for additional Endoscopy services with 904 procedures to be provided through this funding. This will be achieved with:

- the addition of fortnightly Saturday sessions commencing in October 2021, based on running two procedure rooms (285 procedures);
- 0.5 FTE of a Senior Fellow position to focus on procedures (an additional 416 procedures); and
- the recruitment of a 0.5 FTE staff specialist (an additional 200 procedures).

Recruitment has been a focus of improving capacity to undertake outpatient clinic appointments and procedures within the Endoscopy Suite. An additional Gastroenterology Nurse has already been employed to specifically focus on complex and high-risk outpatients. This will improve access and efficiency within the outpatient clinic when patients are being assessed for a procedure.

Recruitment for a Senior Endoscopy Fellow is currently taking place to join the team to undertake further Endoscopy procedures.

Better waitlist allocation between the two public health services, CHS and Calvary Public Hospital is also being explored.

Workflow redesign is currently underway to streamline the different clinical components of the Gastroenterology and Hepatology Unit at CHS – Outpatient Services, Endoscopy Procedures and Surveillance Procedures. The workflow redesign further involves review of the Capital Health Network '*Healthcare Pathways*' to improve referral processes to the service. Strengthening this guideline ensures optimal triaging and management of low-risk patients who may not require management at a tertiary health care facility.