

Health System Response

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OFFICIAL

Overview

The Health System Response (HSR) has been developed to provide the Victorian acute health system a strategy to maintain high-quality COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 care, including elective activity.

The HSR delivers a process for assessing health system demand, that will best utilise resources, enable load balancing and assist in relieving system pressures by generating capacity in high demand periods.

How the Health System Response will work

The HSR has four Stages, ranging from Stage One to Stage Four, reflecting the level of demand on the system, that will be applied at a state level.

Assigned to each Stage are a series of levers, separated into local and central.

Local levers will be applied at a health service level, with local decision making determining the timing and extent their implementation:

- Workforce initiatives: guidance on scalable and flexible workforce models, that will support health services to plan and respond to escalating demand
- Private Hospital Support: local agreements between public hospitals and operators of private hospitals to develop local COVID-19 Support agreements to maintain as high a proportion of planned care as possible
- Emergency Department initiatives: scalable policies implemented at an Emergency Department level of an acute health service
- Patient transport strategies (implemented at Ambulance Victoria's discretion): Ambulance Victoria strategies to support improved transport efficiencies.

Central levers are applied by the Department of Health to ensure operational consistency and to provide a systemic way to addressing increased demand.

- The COVID-19 Streaming Model: A system whereby all COVID-19 patients requiring acute hospital services are cared for at a selected number of health services
- The Health Service Response Centre: A Department of Health coordinating function, operating as a single point of escalation and resolution of system-level issues in response to increased COVID-19 hospitalisation demand
- Emergency Management Response: Health Emergency Response arrangements to ensure that additional capability and capacity can be mobilised

- COVID Positive Pathways program: Coordinated by the Department of Health and delivered by Victorian hospitals, community health services, GPs to provide clinical care and support at home for Victorians diagnosed with COVID-19, who are most likely to need additional support.

The central levers are called and enacted by the Department. Local levers are at the discretion of health services.

How the Health System Response will be implemented

Using the HSR, Department of Health and health sector operational leads will monitor key system demand metrics to determine the level of stress on the overall health system.

A two-step decision process will be used.

- Step 1 - will involve a matrix style approach, where COVID-19 admissions are mapped against a process which categorises workforce constraints (See below)

	0-400 COVID-19 hospitalisations	401-800 COVID-19 hospitalisations	801-1400 COVID-19 hospitalisations	1401-2000+ COVID-19 hospitalisations
None to low workforce constraints	Stage One	Stage One	Stage Two	Stage Three
Moderate workforce constraints	Stage Two	Stage Two	Stage Three	Stage Four
Severe workforce constraints	Stage Two	Stage Three	Stage Four	Stage Four
Critical workforce constraints	Stage Three	Stage Four	Stage Four	Stage Four

- **Step 2** utilises a qualitative and quantitative risk assessment, using a range of supplementary information and metrics available to the Department of Health focused on admitted, emergency and ambulance services demand.

If it is determined that the level of demand necessitates a change in stages, the Department of Health will enact and communicate the decision to health service CEOs.

It is expected that health services will communicate any change in stages to their staff, so that appropriate changes in practice and service provision can be made.

The Department of Health will continue to work with health services to understand system demand and capacity constraints and this information will inform decision making regarding HSR implementation, including stage changes.

Further information

COVID Positive Pathways <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/covid-positive-pathways>

Code Brown Guidelines <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/publications/code-brown-guidelines>

Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015

<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/nursing-and-midwifery/safe-patient-care-nurse-to-patient-and-midwife-to-patient-ratios-act-2015>

Virtual care (Telehealth) <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/rural-health/telehealth>

Acute Care <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/patient-care/acute-care>

Emergency Care <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/patient-care/emergency-care>

Health and support for healthcare workers – COVID-19 <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/covid-19/help-and-support-for-healthcare-workers-covid-19>

Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

Why was the HSR developed?

The HSR (formally known as the Health System Response) was developed to ensure high-quality COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 care is delivered, including elective activity, during periods of high demand.

How does the HSR differ from the Victorian Health Service Guidance and Response (VHSGR) to COVID-19 Risks?

The VHSGR was developed to support health services response to changing risks of COVID-19 transmission in the community, by providing escalated guidance and advice in line with increasing risk of COVID-19 transmission.

The HSR moves away from providing guidance and advice at a hospital level, to providing a systemwide plan to assist the sector to manage demand and generate capacity.

How long will the HSR Stages be applied for?

Any Stage applied will be reviewed and monitored regularly by the Department of Health. If and when new data and information is available that indicates that the level of demand on the system is increasing or reducing, this will be discussed, and an appropriate decision will be made.

How long will the HSR be in place for?

The HSR will be evaluated and reviewed regularly and will be in place throughout 2022 and 2023.

Is influenza considered in the HSR?

Yes, influenza transmission rates in the community are considered as part of the HSR stage decision-making process.

Who does the HSR apply to?

The Health System Response will apply to Victorian public acute hospitals with interdependencies within the private sector on elements related to the streaming of COVID-19 patients and elective surgery