

By email to:

Chairs Health Service Boards –

Child and Adolescent Health Service, East Metro Health Service, North Metro Health Service, South Metro Health Service and WA Country Health Service

Chief Executives -

Child and Adolescent Health Service, East Metro Health Service, North Metro Health Service, South Metro Health Service and WA Country Health Service

Director General - Department of Health

Commissioner - Mental Health Commission

28 February 2018

Dear Chairs, Director General, Commissioner for Mental Health, and Chief Executives

People stuck in EDs waiting for a mental health bed – HSP bed flow management issues

The Australasian College for an Emergency Medicine's (ACEM) report released this week about waiting times in emergency departments (EDs) highlighted WA as the worst state in relation to mental health admissions.

That same morning we had 34 people waiting in EDs for a mental health bed. Of those who were on forms (ie waiting for a compulsory examination to determine if they should be made involuntary which also means they are detained in the ED and need a secure bed) there were **5 people who had been waiting for 2-4 days** (ie this was their 4th day waiting in ED). We also had **4 children (under 18) waiting for a bed for 2 to 6 days.**

This is clearly unacceptable health care and not an isolated occurrence. The day ACEM conducted its spot check was in fact a very light mental health day in the EDs and yet still WA came out as the worst state.

The Sustainable Health Review Interim Report released this week also clearly raised both the bed flow issue and governance amongst the health service providers (HSPs), Department of Health and Mental Health Commission in two of their nine recommendations for immediate action.

The problem is partly lack of mental health hospital beds, partly lack of services in the community, but also because the HSPs in WA have not reached agreement on an improved patient flow process. The bed flow process which did exist was not good enough and is also breaking down.

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The review on patient flow which is underway is only expected to report back by the end of March and there is no guarantee that the HSPs will reach agreement. Even then I am told the end of March report will not include groups like 16 and 17 year old children. According to MHAS records, in the 2 months of November and December 2017, 22 children were stuck in an ED or inappropriate ward for 2 or more days.

I would like to know what strategies and planning is underway by your health service to improve the plight of mental health consumers in EDs. I am sure that I don't need to tell you how distressing it is for them and their families and the impact delayed treatment can have.

I would particularly like a commitment from each of you that an improved assertive patient flow process for all mental health patients (adults and children) is agreed between you as a matter of urgency and the timing in which this will happen. That agreement and patient flow process should also be made public.

Please note that I intend to put this letter on the MHAS website with your response.

Yours sincerely



Debora Colvin
CHIEF MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCATE

cc
Hon Roger Cook MLA
Minister for Health, Mental Health

By Email - Minister.Cook@dpc.wa.gov.au