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Initiative to Cut Elective Surgery Waiting Lists

The Territory Government today announced details of an initiative that aims to cut elective surgery waiting lists by 20% by mid-year.

The Health Minister Chris Burns said when he took on responsibility for the portfolio he asked the Health Department to focus on cutting elective surgery waiting lists.

“The number of people waiting for elective surgery in the Territory is falling but we need to do more,” Dr Burns said.

As at 31 March this year, there were 3143 patients waiting for elective surgery in the NT, down 8.9% from 3449 at that time last year.

“I understand the frustration that delays to elective surgery can cause to people’s lives. I made it plain to the Department that the situation has to be fixed,” Dr Burns said.

“Waiting lists for elective surgery are a problem Australia-wide. Our emergency departments are the busiest in the country and this obviously affects the hospitals’ ability to provide elective services.

“That's why we have developed and implemented a targeted approach that focuses on those who have been waiting the longest for their elective surgery.”

This includes:

- The opening of a third operating theatre at Alice Springs Hospital
- A partnership with Darwin Private Hospital to provide 10 beds (weekdays) and 5 beds (over weekends) for post operative care
- Visiting ophthalmology and ear, nose, throat services at Katherine Hospital
- Sponsoring visiting specialists at Gove and Tennant Creek hospitals

A co-ordinator has been appointed to oversee the initiative, and doctors have formed a clinical reference group to manage the surgical efforts.

The Territory Government also recently announced a partnership with the Australian Government and the Fred Hollows Foundation to conduct a “blitz” on eye surgery in Central Australia.

“This will further reduce waiting times, with 40 patients to be treated next month and more clinics later in the year.

“I am confident all of these initiatives will make a significant impact on elective surgery waiting times.

“The Health Department is to be congratulated for the response it has produced.”

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ELECTIVE SURGERY
FACT SHEET

- The Territory Government has increased the Health and Community Services Budget by 64% since 2001

- Since 2001, we have employed more than 270 nurses and 100 doctors

- The State of Our Hospitals Report 2006 shows the Territory has the greatest demand for elective surgery in the country with 37 admissions per 1000 people. The national average is 27 per 1000 people

- Despite the higher demand, the median waiting time for elective surgery in the Territory is 29 days. This is the same as the national level and better than New South Wales, Tasmania, South Australia and the ACT.

- The State of Our Hospitals Report 2006 shows the Northern Territory has the busiest Emergency Departments in the country. This affects the provision of elective surgery.

- Despite the increasing demand, elective surgery waiting lists have kept pace.

- The number of people on waiting lists is falling. As at 31 March 2007, there were 3143 patients waiting for elective surgery, down 8.9% from 3449 at the same time last year.