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**NT HEALTH DIRECT UP AND RUNNING**

The first weekend of the Health Call Centre in the Northern Territory has produced encouraging results with more than 160 people using the service.

The calls were taken by experienced registered nurses who helped callers with; symptoms, listened to health concerns, provided information on what to do and when, including when to see a doctor and where to find their closest health professional.

“This is a really encouraging start to the month-long trial first stage of *NT Health Direct* which involves all calls to hospital emergency departments being redirected to the call centre,” Dr Toyne said.

“160 calls which would have been answered by emergency department staff were instead handled by professional nurses in the call centre.

“The time spent answering those calls is the equivalent to one full time position in the emergency department – this means ED staff are helping patients instead of answering phone calls.

“*NT Health Direct* is delivering a high quality service for the Northern Territory community and builds on the extra $154 million and 100 extra nurses already in the health system.

“The Western Australian call centre, on which the NT service is based has resulted in only half the callers who planned to visit the emergency department actually attending.

“This means our emergency departments will be helping those who need it most.

Maxine Drake, senior advocate, Health Consumers Council WA said her state’s call service has been an outstanding success.

“The community has embraced the service and if it were to be changed or taken away, there would be an outcry,” she said.

The second stage will be introduced on April 20 and will see the full launch of the 1800 free call, 24 hours a day, seven days a week service for the general public.

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