

Unveiling the hidden waiting lists

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The Plan to rebuild essential services

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“We would like to have this accurate, honest information for the public to access on the Internet”

- Neroli Ellis, ANMF State Secretary, Parliament of Tasmania Hansard, 16 November 2012.

Unveiling the hidden waiting lists

A majority Hodgman Liberal Government will unveil the true state of the waiting lists in Tasmania, by publicly releasing secretly held data.

Transparent, measurable outcomes

In line with the Liberals' *Healthy Futures* framework which commits to transparent, measurable outcomes in all areas of health, **a majority Hodgman Liberal Government will –**

- **Publish information** on each specialist outpatient service, waiting time for patients per category, patients waiting within clinically-recommended timeframes and Statewide Endoscopy Waiting Lists; and
- Work with our health professionals to ensure relevant **Key Performance Indicators in all areas of health performance**, and report publicly against these.

This is a simple and inexpensive commitment that will help patients, together with their GPs, make informed decisions about their healthcare options.

Better management of outpatient wait lists

The Liberals will also work with hospital specialists, outpatient staff and surgical liaison nurses, as well as GPs, to improve the operations of outpatient clinics.

Currently, around a third of clinical appointments in the south of the State simply do not happen. Over 60 per cent of the time it is because hospitals cancel or change the appointment for a variety of reasons; however there is also a high failure-to-attend rate of patients. With an estimated 70 per cent of phone calls to outpatient clinics in the south going unanswered, this may be a contributing factor. When the hospital cancels appointments, patients get frustrated; when patients fail to attend appointments, the time of our specialists is wasted.

A majority Hodgman Liberal Government will work closely with our hospitals to –

- **ensure adequate resourcing in our hospitals** to allow for better engagement with Tasmanians on waiting lists to improve attendance rates;
- **ensure outpatient clinic times** are more suited to the clinical demands of specialists, to reduce cancellations of appointments; and
- **ensure outpatient waiting lists** are kept up to date and regularly audited, so appointments are not wasted.

Labor-Green waiting list failures

The true wait for access to public hospitals in Tasmania is significantly longer than that published quarterly by the State Labor-Green Government.

That's because, as well as those on official published elective surgery waiting lists, there are thousands of Tasmanians stuck in no-man's land, on hidden waiting lists, waiting for an appointment with a hospital specialist after a referral from their GP, or waiting for important diagnostic procedures. These are the waiting lists the Labor-Green Government is keeping secret.

As a result of Liberal Questions on Notice and Right to Information requests, we know that at June this year, there were over **15,000 Tasmanians on just two hidden lists**, including –

- 12,229 on the Statewide Surgical Outpatient Waiting Listⁱ, waiting for an appointment with a hospital specialist, after referral from a GP; and
- 3,255 on the Statewide endoscopy waiting list, waiting for a diagnostic procedure like a colonoscopy, gastroscopy or endoscopyⁱⁱ.

This is **in addition** to the official waiting list for elective surgery where 7,434 are waitingⁱⁱⁱ.

Five months on, we are aware that the hidden waiting lists have increased further, and that in the south alone, more than 20,000 people are waiting to either get an outpatient clinic appointment or receive much-needed surgery or endoscopy. Statewide, it is now estimated there are **over 30,000 Tasmanians on all waiting lists – hidden and published**.

The pre-wait waiting period can effectively double or even treble the time from referral by a GP to treatment.

A Parliamentary Inquiry hearing took evidence from the Nursing Manager of the Outpatient Clinics at the RHH, who said:

"People wait years to see someone in clinics and then they go on the elective surgery waiting list and they wait another number of years until they actually receive their treatment"^{iv}.

By regularly releasing these hidden waiting lists, Tasmanian patients and GPs can have access to accurate, honest and up-to-date information, so they can understand exactly what the wait times are in each specialty, and in each region.

ⁱ *Question on Notice No. 30 - Surgical Outpatients Waiting List at 17 June 2013.

ⁱⁱ Question on Notice No. 31 - Endoscopy Waiting Lists at 30 April 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱ DHHS Progress Report, September 2013.

^{iv} Parliament of Tasmania Hansard, 16 November 2012.

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The Liberals believe it is important that Tasmanians, as well as GPs, have the full picture of how our health system is performing.