

**Specialist Outpatient Services**  
in Queensland Public Hospitals

---

**Queensland  
Government  
response**

---

July 2007

## Foreword

Specialist outpatient services are critically important to consumers. The only specialist services that many Queenslanders can afford are the services provided by public hospitals. This is due to a number of reasons, including the increasing out of pocket costs under Medicare. Specialist outpatient services are also important as part of the education experience of undergraduate and post graduate trainees.

There have always been waits in outpatients and waiting times are not just a problem in the public sector. There are also long waits for some specialties in the private sector.

In the past governments of both political persuasions have focused on elective surgery waiting times as the key indicator of access to health services. However, waiting times for outpatients are also important – some would argue more important. Unlike elective surgery booking lists where a patient on the waiting list has been assessed by a Queensland Health clinician, waiting times for outpatient services represent an “unknown”, where the assessment of urgency is usually based only on referral notes from General Practitioners (GPs).

Addressing the problems of outpatient services is an extremely urgent and high priority for Queensland Health. Our first step in addressing this problem was to establish a Specialist Outpatient Review Committee which examined outpatient services in five major hospitals and has made broad ranging recommendations that affect all Queensland public hospitals. Government also considered issues related to outpatient services as part of the 2007–08 budget process and we have now allocated \$20 million recurrent for outpatient services as the first stage of our response to the Committee’s Report. Hospital-level task forces will be established to drive further reform at the local level and Queensland will also highlight issues relating to outpatient services in the forthcoming negotiations with the Commonwealth about the renewal of the Australian Health Care Agreement.

The report from the Specialist Outpatient Review Committee makes a number of very concerning findings and outlines a number of recommendations to address some serious, but rectifiable, issues in relation to the provision of specialist outpatient service in Queensland public hospitals. In keeping with the Government’s commitment to accountability and transparency, this Report has been released on the Queensland Health Internet site.

Cabinet has considered the report and endorsed this response.

In 2005 we started a wide range of reforms to the Queensland Health system, many of which are coming to fruition and are starting to make a difference. Reforming outpatient services and improving access for patients is the next step in this reform agenda.

We will immediately establish the Specialist Outpatient Strategic Advisory Committee (SOSAC) to provide strategic advice to myself and the Queensland Health Executive in relation to the development and implementation of reforms within specialist outpatient services. The SOSAC will also lead the development and implementation of a Specialist Outpatient Services Governance Policy that will clearly define the role that specialist outpatient services play in a whole-of-health system context. It is anticipated that this Policy will be available for public comment in early 2008.

The SOSAC will provide regular reports to me and the Director-General on the progress of the specialist outpatient services reform initiatives outlined hereunder. Reports on progress on outpatient reform will be a regular feature of the Quarterly Public Hospitals Performance Report.

The Government response outlines the way forward for all the recommendations suggested by the Specialist Outpatient Review Committee.

**Stephen Robertson MP**  
**Minister for Health**

## Introduction

As part of the Government's ongoing commitment towards improving the Queensland public health system, the Minister for Health commissioned a review into specialist outpatient services in five of the States largest hospitals; Princess Alexandra Hospital, Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, Gold Cost Hospital, Cairns Hospital and Rockhampton Hospital.

The Specialist Outpatient Review Committee, chaired by Professor Ken Donald, submitted its report to the Minister for Health in June 2007. The report outlines a number of recommendations to address some serious, but rectifiable, issues in relation to the provision of specialist outpatient service in Queensland public hospitals. In keeping with the Government's commitment to accountability and transparency, this Report has been released on the Queensland Health Internet site.

Queensland provides extensive outpatient services – over 9 million occasions of service per annum. But there are waiting times for access to these services at many hospitals. As part of the wider health reform agenda, the Queensland Government has acknowledged the imperative of elevating the visibility and importance of specialist outpatient services by providing \$20 million (recurrent) in the 2007-08 Budget to support service expansions and innovative, longer-term reform strategies in this important area of the health system. These reform strategies are detailed in the following table.

| Recommendation   | Government response   |                                    |           |   |           |                 |             |                                   |           |   |           |  |           |                                 |                    |  |           |                                      |           |                                   |           |  |             |   |           |   |           |                                  |           |                                 |                    |   |           |                                |           |                                   |          |                                    |             |                                 |                    |
|--|---|------------------------------------|-----------|---|-----------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|---|-----------|--|-----------|---------------------------------|--------------------|--|-----------|--------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------|-----------|--|-------------|---|-----------|---|-----------|----------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|--------------------|---|-----------|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------|----------|------------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| <p><b>Recommendation 1</b></p> <p>That Government, as a health service priority, invests in improving access to and delivery of specialist outpatient services in Queensland public hospitals.</p> | <p><b>Supported.</b></p> <p>As an immediate response, the Government has provided \$20M recurrently in the 2007-08 Budget. \$11.4M (recurrent) has been allocated to Districts to boost services, and provide for innovation in outpatient services in key hospitals. In the first instance these allocations are targeted at those clinics that have long waits for access as at 1 March 2007. Allocations are as follows:</p> <p><b>Proposed allocation of recurrent outpatient funding</b></p> <p><b>Southern Area Health Service</b></p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Gold Coast Health Service District</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$750,468</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Princess Alexandra Hospital and Health Service District</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$811,732</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mater Hospitals</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$1,083,507</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Southside Health Service District</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$880,286</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Toowoomba and Darling Downs Health Service District</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$732,362</td> </tr> <tr> <td>West Moreton South Burnett Health Service District</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$819,462</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Total outpatients – SAHS</b></td> <td style="text-align: right;"><b>\$5,077,818</b></td> </tr> </table> <p><b>Central Area Health Service</b></p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Central Queensland Health Service District</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$325,232</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fraser Coast Health Service District</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$115,842</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Northside Health Service District</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$619,163</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Royal Brisbane and Womens Hospital and Health Service District</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$1,890,178</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Royal Children’s Hospital Health Service District</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$522,068</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sunshine Coast Cooloola Health Service District</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$603,272</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Wide Bay Health Service District</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$169,635</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Total outpatients – CAHS</b></td> <td style="text-align: right;"><b>\$4,245,390</b></td> </tr> </table> <p><b>Northern Area Health Service</b></p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Cairns and Hinterland District Health Service</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$609,412</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mackay Health Service District</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$159,525</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mount Isa Health Service District</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$39,184</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Townsville Health Service District</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$1,263,671</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Total outpatients – NAHS</b></td> <td style="text-align: right;"><b>\$2,071,792</b></td> </tr> </table> <p><b>State total initial allocation</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>\$11,395,000</b></span></p> | Gold Coast Health Service District | \$750,468 | Princess Alexandra Hospital and Health Service District | \$811,732 | Mater Hospitals | \$1,083,507 | Southside Health Service District | \$880,286 | Toowoomba and Darling Downs Health Service District | \$732,362 | West Moreton South Burnett Health Service District | \$819,462 | <b>Total outpatients – SAHS</b> | <b>\$5,077,818</b> | Central Queensland Health Service District | \$325,232 | Fraser Coast Health Service District | \$115,842 | Northside Health Service District | \$619,163 | Royal Brisbane and Womens Hospital and Health Service District | \$1,890,178 | Royal Children’s Hospital Health Service District | \$522,068 | Sunshine Coast Cooloola Health Service District | \$603,272 | Wide Bay Health Service District | \$169,635 | <b>Total outpatients – CAHS</b> | <b>\$4,245,390</b> | Cairns and Hinterland District Health Service | \$609,412 | Mackay Health Service District | \$159,525 | Mount Isa Health Service District | \$39,184 | Townsville Health Service District | \$1,263,671 | <b>Total outpatients – NAHS</b> | <b>\$2,071,792</b> |
| Gold Coast Health Service District   | \$750,468   |                                    |           |   |           |                 |             |                                   |           |   |           |  |           |                                 |                    |  |           |                                      |           |                                   |           |  |             |   |           |   |           |                                  |           |                                 |                    |   |           |                                |           |                                   |          |                                    |             |                                 |                    |
| Princess Alexandra Hospital and Health Service District  | \$811,732   |                                    |           |   |           |                 |             |                                   |           |   |           |  |           |                                 |                    |  |           |                                      |           |                                   |           |  |             |   |           |   |           |                                  |           |                                 |                    |   |           |                                |           |                                   |          |                                    |             |                                 |                    |
| Mater Hospitals  | \$1,083,507   |                                    |           |   |           |                 |             |                                   |           |   |           |  |           |                                 |                    |  |           |                                      |           |                                   |           |  |             |   |           |   |           |                                  |           |                                 |                    |   |           |                                |           |                                   |          |                                    |             |                                 |                    |
| Southside Health Service District  | \$880,286   |                                    |           |   |           |                 |             |                                   |           |   |           |  |           |                                 |                    |  |           |                                      |           |                                   |           |  |             |   |           |   |           |                                  |           |                                 |                    |   |           |                                |           |                                   |          |                                    |             |                                 |                    |
| Toowoomba and Darling Downs Health Service District  | \$732,362   |                                    |           |   |           |                 |             |                                   |           |   |           |  |           |                                 |                    |  |           |                                      |           |                                   |           |  |             |   |           |   |           |                                  |           |                                 |                    |   |           |                                |           |                                   |          |                                    |             |                                 |                    |
| West Moreton South Burnett Health Service District   | \$819,462   |                                    |           |   |           |                 |             |                                   |           |   |           |  |           |                                 |                    |  |           |                                      |           |                                   |           |  |             |   |           |   |           |                                  |           |                                 |                    |   |           |                                |           |                                   |          |                                    |             |                                 |                    |
| <b>Total outpatients – SAHS</b>  | <b>\$5,077,818</b>  |                                    |           |   |           |                 |             |                                   |           |   |           |  |           |                                 |                    |  |           |                                      |           |                                   |           |  |             |   |           |   |           |                                  |           |                                 |                    |   |           |                                |           |                                   |          |                                    |             |                                 |                    |
| Central Queensland Health Service District   | \$325,232   |                                    |           |   |           |                 |             |                                   |           |   |           |  |           |                                 |                    |  |           |                                      |           |                                   |           |  |             |   |           |   |           |                                  |           |                                 |                    |   |           |                                |           |                                   |          |                                    |             |                                 |                    |
| Fraser Coast Health Service District   | \$115,842   |                                    |           |   |           |                 |             |                                   |           |   |           |  |           |                                 |                    |  |           |                                      |           |                                   |           |  |             |   |           |   |           |                                  |           |                                 |                    |   |           |                                |           |                                   |          |                                    |             |                                 |                    |
| Northside Health Service District  | \$619,163   |                                    |           |   |           |                 |             |                                   |           |   |           |  |           |                                 |                    |  |           |                                      |           |                                   |           |  |             |   |           |   |           |                                  |           |                                 |                    |   |           |                                |           |                                   |          |                                    |             |                                 |                    |
| Royal Brisbane and Womens Hospital and Health Service District   | \$1,890,178   |                                    |           |   |           |                 |             |                                   |           |   |           |  |           |                                 |                    |  |           |                                      |           |                                   |           |  |             |   |           |   |           |                                  |           |                                 |                    |   |           |                                |           |                                   |          |                                    |             |                                 |                    |
| Royal Children’s Hospital Health Service District  | \$522,068   |                                    |           |   |           |                 |             |                                   |           |   |           |  |           |                                 |                    |  |           |                                      |           |                                   |           |  |             |   |           |   |           |                                  |           |                                 |                    |   |           |                                |           |                                   |          |                                    |             |                                 |                    |
| Sunshine Coast Cooloola Health Service District  | \$603,272   |                                    |           |   |           |                 |             |                                   |           |   |           |  |           |                                 |                    |  |           |                                      |           |                                   |           |  |             |   |           |   |           |                                  |           |                                 |                    |   |           |                                |           |                                   |          |                                    |             |                                 |                    |
| Wide Bay Health Service District   | \$169,635   |                                    |           |   |           |                 |             |                                   |           |   |           |  |           |                                 |                    |  |           |                                      |           |                                   |           |  |             |   |           |   |           |                                  |           |                                 |                    |   |           |                                |           |                                   |          |                                    |             |                                 |                    |
| <b>Total outpatients – CAHS</b>  | <b>\$4,245,390</b>  |                                    |           |   |           |                 |             |                                   |           |   |           |  |           |                                 |                    |  |           |                                      |           |                                   |           |  |             |   |           |   |           |                                  |           |                                 |                    |   |           |                                |           |                                   |          |                                    |             |                                 |                    |
| Cairns and Hinterland District Health Service  | \$609,412   |                                    |           |   |           |                 |             |                                   |           |   |           |  |           |                                 |                    |  |           |                                      |           |                                   |           |  |             |   |           |   |           |                                  |           |                                 |                    |   |           |                                |           |                                   |          |                                    |             |                                 |                    |
| Mackay Health Service District   | \$159,525   |                                    |           |   |           |                 |             |                                   |           |   |           |  |           |                                 |                    |  |           |                                      |           |                                   |           |  |             |   |           |   |           |                                  |           |                                 |                    |   |           |                                |           |                                   |          |                                    |             |                                 |                    |
| Mount Isa Health Service District  | \$39,184  |                                    |           |   |           |                 |             |                                   |           |   |           |  |           |                                 |                    |  |           |                                      |           |                                   |           |  |             |   |           |   |           |                                  |           |                                 |                    |   |           |                                |           |                                   |          |                                    |             |                                 |                    |
| Townsville Health Service District   | \$1,263,671   |                                    |           |   |           |                 |             |                                   |           |   |           |  |           |                                 |                    |  |           |                                      |           |                                   |           |  |             |   |           |   |           |                                  |           |                                 |                    |   |           |                                |           |                                   |          |                                    |             |                                 |                    |
| <b>Total outpatients – NAHS</b>  | <b>\$2,071,792</b>  |                                    |           |   |           |                 |             |                                   |           |   |           |  |           |                                 |                    |  |           |                                      |           |                                   |           |  |             |   |           |   |           |                                  |           |                                 |                    |   |           |                                |           |                                   |          |                                    |             |                                 |                    |

| Recommendation   | Government response   |
|--|---|
| <p><i>Recommendation 1 continued</i></p> <p>That there is bi-partisan political recognition of the issues and support for the recommendations outlined in this report.</p> | <p>The balance of available funds is to be allocated to achieve other recommendations in the SORC Report, including programs to be developed in conjunction with referring GPs. Funds have also been retained to support diversion of patients to private specialists where particularly long waits have been identified and where there is no further capacity in the public sector.</p> <p>The priority will be to address long waits for outpatient bookings, with the aim of implementing maximum waiting time guidelines for patients as services expand and new medical specialists are trained.</p> <p>Specifically we will aim to see essentially all patients (operationalised as 95 per cent of patients) within the following time frames:</p> <p>By 30 June 2009: within 18 months<br/>           By 30 June 2010: within 12 months<br/>           By 30 June 2012: within 6 months<br/>           By 30 June 2014: within 3 months</p> <p>Further outpatient expansion will also occur through the development of bulk-billing clinics in hospitals.</p> <p>The expansion of outpatient services will increase the number of patients added to the elective surgery waiting lists and may have an impact on elective surgery waiting times. Some of the 2007-08 outpatient funding will be allocated to increase access to same-day or outpatient procedures (colonoscopies, cataract surgery) to mitigate this effect.</p> <p>The Minister will seek bi-partisan support for the Report, its recommendations and this response in Parliament.</p> |

| Recommendation  | Government response   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Recommendation 2</b></p> <p>That Queensland Health establishes a Strategic Advisory Committee, chaired by a member of Queensland Health's Executive Management Team, to lead the development and statewide implementation of a Specialist Outpatient Services Governance Policy. This Policy should clearly articulate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The role of specialist outpatient services in a whole-of-system context and accurately define the scope-of-practice around which Health Service Districts are to provide specialist outpatient services;</li> <li>– The types of services to be provided through specialist outpatients including developing clinical protocols for patients to be discharged for ongoing care in the community;</li> <li>– The rights of patients utilising specialist outpatient services including the right to receive timely specialist advice through the implementation of a maximum waiting time policy;</li> <li>– The responsibilities of patients and referring practitioners in accessing specialist outpatient services;</li> <li>– The responsibilities of Queensland Health practitioners in the delivery of specialist outpatient services.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Supported.</b></p> <p>A high-level advisory committee, the Specialist Outpatient Strategic Advisory Committee (SOSAC), will be established immediately to provide strategic leadership and advice to the Queensland Health executive, including the Director-General and Minister for Health, in the development and implementation of a Specialist Outpatient Services Governance Policy, within the context of the Statewide Health Services Plan.</p> <p>The proposed membership for SOSAC is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr Stephen Duckett (Chair), Executive Director, Reform and Development Division, Queensland Health</li> <li>• Dr Anita Green, Director, GP Partners</li> <li>• Dr Michael Cleary; Executive Director of Medical Services, Southside Health Service District</li> <li>• Ms Pam Lane, District Manager, West Moreton and South Burnett Health Service District</li> <li>• Dr Bernard Whitfield, Royal Australasian College of Surgeons representative</li> <li>• Dr Cameron Bennett, Royal Australasian College of Physicians representative</li> <li>• Dr Aaron Groves, Director of Mental Health, Queensland Health</li> <li>• Ms Jo Broadbent, Nurse Unit Manager, Specialist Outpatient Department, Gold Coast Hospital</li> <li>• Ms Maree Raymer, Coordinating Project Officer, Fit for Surgery Project</li> <li>• Ms Sylvia Hunt, Manager Administrative Support and Development Unit, Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital</li> <li>• Consumer</li> </ul> <p>The SOSAC will provide a quarterly report to the Director-General and the Minister for Health on the progress of the specialist outpatient services reform initiatives outlined in this document.</p> <p>The SOSAC will develop and finalise a new Specialist Outpatient Services Policy in 2008.</p> |

| Recommendation  | Government response   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Recommendation 3</b></p> <p>That Queensland Health establishes a state-wide performance management framework (scorecard) including the development of KPIs, including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Number of patients waiting longer than 12 months for an appointment;</li> <li>– New case attendances by specialty;</li> <li>– Review case attendances by specialty;</li> <li>– Ratio of new cases to review cases by specialty;</li> <li>– Failed to attend rates by specialty;</li> <li>– Occasions of unplanned medical leave by specialty;</li> <li>– Number of patients discharged from specialist outpatient care.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Supported.</b></p> <p>This recommendation will require a significant body of work in the development of a new centralised collection, including the establishment of a centralised reporting database and enhancements to the existing information management systems. Funds have been set aside in the 2007-08 new allocation for this work.</p> <p>The current information management systems used in Queensland specialist outpatient departments will require functionality enhancements to collect some of the information recommended through the review. This will involve working with the external software vendors to ensure the required functionality is included as part of their system development plans.</p> <p>Work will also need to be done in relation to managing the changed business processes at the operational level.</p> <p>This will require a phased development and implementation strategy with improved reporting capabilities by 1 July 2008. A more robust reporting framework should be fully in place by the end of 2008. In the mean time, outpatient performance measures will be added to the published Queensland Health Quarterly Reports.</p> |

| Recommendation   | Government response  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Recommendation 4</b></p> <p>That Queensland Health ensures access to specialist outpatient services is optimised through the review and consideration of alternative funding and service delivery models. This may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– State funding commensurate with service growth and allocation of health dollar per capita equal to other states;</li> <li>– Negotiating with the Australian Government as part of the 2008-2013 AHCA that all outpatient services be funded by the Australian Government;</li> <li>– Increasing access to specialist outpatient appointments within the public hospital system by providing new bulk billing clinics;</li> <li>– Increasing access to specialist outpatient appointments within the public hospital system by identifying where new or expanded services have been provided since 1 July 1998 and, consistent with the current AHCA, converting those clinics to bulk billing with the increased revenue being retained to fund increased access to outpatient services not covered by bulk billing revenue.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Supported.</b></p> <p>Government has provided as its first stage response \$20M recurrently in the 2007-08 Budget as a demonstration of its commitment to expanding outpatient services immediately. Further improvement in outpatient services will also occur following the work of hospital outpatient task forces (see response to Recommendation 9) and negotiation with the Australian Government in the context of the Australian Health Care Agreement (AHCA).</p> <p>Funding reforms for specialist outpatient services will be incorporated in Queensland’s negotiating position for the next AHCA, which covers the period 1 July 2008 to 30 June 2013. It is anticipated that, as an outcome of these negotiations with the Australian Government, Queensland hospitals will have increased scope to increase the levels of service provided to patients waiting to see a specialist through public outpatient departments.</p> <p>In preparation for the Agreement negotiations, Queensland and the Australian Governments have jointly commissioned a consultancy report on outpatient services. This augurs well for a cooperative approach with the Australian Government to address this important issue.</p> <p>Additionally, Queensland Health will approach the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing to request the introduction of pilot trials of new funding models prior to 1 July 2008.</p> <p>Health Services Districts will also prepare plans for the establishment of additional bulk-billing clinics in accordance with the current AHCA. These plans are to be submitted to Queensland Health by 30 September 2007 with implementation from January 2008.</p> |

| Recommendation   | Government response   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Recommendation 5</b></p> <p>That Queensland Health monitors and manages waiting times for urgent and semi urgent patients in accordance with agreed clinical urgency category timeframes of:<br/>Category 1 – Appointment within 30 days desirable; and<br/>Category 2 – Appointment within 90 days desirable.</p> <p>That Queensland Health implements a waiting time guarantee for accessing specialist outpatient services. The Committee agrees that a 12-month maximum waiting time for non-urgent (Category 3) patients is reasonable.</p> | <p><b>Supported in principle.</b></p> <p>The categorisation system used in specialist outpatient departments should be specialty specific to ensure that the most clinically urgent patients are seen first. It is widely recognised that the existing clinical categorisation system does not allow for crucial distinctions between specialties with regard to ‘clinical urgency’. The development of specialty specific categorisation systems will deliver clear expected treatment time lines which should be adhered to in all hospitals. This work will be conducted under the auspices of the Specialist Outpatient Strategic Advisory Committee.</p> <p>The introduction of maximum waiting time guidelines will require a phased in approach (see response to Recommendation 1).</p> <p>Districts will give a specific priority to addressing the ‘longest waiting’ patients as part of the funding allocation provided in the 2007-08 Budget.</p>        |
| <p><b>Recommendation 6</b></p> <p>That Queensland Health publishes waiting times for new patient appointments by hospital and by individual clinic.</p>  | <p><b>Supported.</b></p> <p>As with Recommendation 3, this will require work around the development of a new central collection system, including enhancements to the existing outpatient information system. It will also require development of specialty specific categorisation systems for outpatients and negotiation with GPs and Specialists. This work will be conducted under the auspices of the Specialist Outpatient Strategic Advisory Committee.</p> <p>Queensland Health will continue to publish specialist outpatient services waiting list information (numbers of patients waiting) and develop a website which provides more information about the services available and local referral requirements, including diagnostic tests.</p> <p>From 1 January 2008, all new people referred for an outpatient booking will be advised of a realistic estimate of their expected waiting time either directly or via their general practitioner.</p> |

| Recommendation   | Government response   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Recommendation 7</b></p> <p>That Queensland Health provides funding to support mainstreaming complementary models of care within Queensland specialist outpatient services including, but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Orthopaedic Physiotherapy Screening Program;</li> <li>– Nurse practitioner, allied health and primary referral (GP) assessment clinics to enable fast track of referrals in specific specialties (eg. Orthopaedics, Urology and Ophthalmology) and for chronic disease management;</li> <li>– Increase in the use of telemedicine to improve services to rural and remote communities.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Supported.</b></p> <p>A component of the outpatient funding in 2007-08 will be used to support planned introductions of Orthopaedic Physiotherapy Screening Clinics (OPSC) in the following hospitals: Gold Coast, Toowoomba, Logan, Cairns, Princess Alexandra, Redcliffe, Nambour, Mater Adults, Bundaberg, Rockhampton, and Mackay. Pilot OPSC projects currently at Ipswich, Townsville, Royal Brisbane and Women’s will also be funded recurrently in 2007-08.</p> <p>The introduction of other complementary and innovative models of care, including increasing the use of telehealth for specialist outpatient service provision, will be supported in other high demand specialties including Urology and ENT. Queensland Health will provide funding to support proven complementary models of care from 2007-08 onwards.</p> <p>The Queensland Health outpatient collection system will be reviewed to measure telehealth activity better with the aim of developing an appropriate funding incentive for increasing telehealth provision of specialist outpatient services into the future.</p> <p>Queensland will also advocate to the Australian Government that it updates Medicare Benefits Schedule to incorporate better recognition of provision of medical services via telehealth.</p> |

| Recommendation  | Government response   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Recommendation 8</b></p> <p>That Queensland Health ensures that all patients, referring specialists and/or GPs are informed of services available through the development of a state-wide directory of specialist outpatient services detailing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Minimum referral requirements (including diagnostic tests) for GPs referring to specialist outpatient clinics;</li> <li>– The types of specialist outpatient clinics/services provided and not provided by Queensland public hospitals by location;</li> <li>– Information for patients to obtain advice in relation to their treatment options;</li> <li>– Clinical guidelines, by specialty, to determine patient priority.</li> </ul> <p>Develop standards and protocols for clinical information requirements (referral) aimed at improving the triage process in specialist outpatient clinics (e.g. ensuring appropriate diagnostic tests prior to outpatient appointments).</p> <p>Investigate and develop standardised electronic tools endorsed by Queensland Health for use by referring practitioners to improve referral processes to specialist outpatient services.</p> <p>Queensland Health and the Queensland Divisions of General Practice (QDGP) collaboratively establish and reach an accord on referral processes and communication systems.</p> | <p><b>Supported.</b></p> <p>Queensland Health will develop a specialist outpatient services website to provide improved information for patients and GPs. See also Recommendation 6. This website will be developed and trialled, in consultation with GPs and specialists, for a planned ‘go live’ by 1 October 2008.</p> <p>Queensland Health will develop electronic referral tools to improve referral processes between GPs and hospitals. This will be done in conjunction with improving specialist outpatient department information management systems (see Recommendation 10). It is intended that a new information management system for specialist outpatient departments will be rolled-out to the State’s largest outpatient services between 1 July 2008 and 1 July 2009.</p> |

| Recommendation  | Government response   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Recommendation 9</b></p> <p>Local (hospital) level management teams are established involving representation from key stakeholders including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Member of District Executive</li> <li>– Local GPs</li> <li>– General Practice Division Representative</li> <li>– Nurse Unit Manager, Specialist Outpatient Department</li> <li>– Physician</li> <li>– Surgeon</li> </ul> <p>Key accountabilities will include, but not be limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Providing a single point of advice to the Clinical CEO/ District Manager for the management of specialist outpatient services;</li> <li>– Providing strategic direction in the management of specialist outpatient services;</li> <li>– Monitoring the performance of specialist outpatient services with regard to access, failed to attend rates, new/review ratios, audit, patient satisfaction and demand.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Supported.</b></p> <p>Health Service Districts will be required to demonstrate improved performance of outpatient departments following implementation of the improved information systems in 2008-09. In the mean time, existing metrics will be used to monitor and drive performance improvement.</p> <p>Districts will also be required to establish Outpatient Task Forces to review and improve operational management of specialist outpatients. These Task Forces will provide interim reports in December 2007 and a final report to the District Manager/Clinical Chief Executive Officer in February 2008 on further strategies, including consultation strategies, to be used to improve outpatient services. The Task Forces will advise on the composition of an ongoing local outpatient management committee. Reports from the Task Forces will be reviewed by the new Specialist Outpatient Services Advisory Committee which will provide a consolidated report on further development of outpatient services to the Director-General and Minister for Health.</p> <p>An Outpatient Process Redesign team will be established to work with key hospitals on improving the timeliness and efficiency of outpatient services.</p> |

| Recommendation  | Government response   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Recommendation 10</b></p> <p>That Queensland Health develops a comprehensive information management strategy for specialist outpatients and provides funding to support the implementation of a new specialist outpatient department information system, which provides the following functionality as a minimum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Enhanced clinical management capabilities including providing on-line access to clinical information to support decision-making for patient care across the spectrum of specialist outpatient services;</li> <li>– Support the development of care plans and treatment protocols in line with the multi-disciplinary model of care necessary in delivering specialist outpatient services.</li> <li>– Support the high level of complexity required for appointment and resource scheduling for delivering specialist outpatient services;</li> <li>– Support the collection, analysis and reporting of longitudinal outcomes data;</li> <li>– Electronic referral and discharge summary capabilities (sending and receiving);</li> <li>– Automated text and/or e-mail messaging functionality for appointment reminders;</li> <li>– Electronic waiting list functionality.</li> </ul> <p>That Queensland Health makes the necessary investment in this area as a priority</p> | <p><b>Supported</b></p> <p>Queensland Health will review the current and potential functionality of the outpatient information management system currently used at the Princess Alexandra and Royal Brisbane and Women’s Hospitals (CERNER-OSIM). This system was implemented at these hospitals to fulfil basic operational requirements, including appointment and resource scheduling; however more advanced functionality is available and not currently used.</p> <p>An analysis will be undertaken by Queensland Health to assess the functionality of this information management system against the functionality prescribed by SORC and to determine whether this system could provide a basis for future investment in rollout both within the Princess Alexandra and Royal Brisbane and Women’s hospitals and to other Queensland hospitals. Funds have been set aside in the 2007-08 new allocation for this work.</p> <p>This gap analysis will be completed by 1 December 2007.</p> |

| Recommendation  | Government response   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Recommendation 11</b></p> <p>That Queensland Health continues to support the training of medical officers and other health professionals in the specialist outpatient services environment, and investigates the expansion of the teaching opportunities to provide further exposure for undergraduate and post graduate health professionals to specialist outpatient services</p> | <p><b>Supported.</b></p> <p>The 2007-08 Budget provides for an expansion of Registrar positions, a significant proportion of Registrar time is in Outpatient Departments.</p> |