



Specialist Outpatient Strategy

Improving the patient
journey by 2020





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Published by the State of Queensland
(Queensland Health), May 2016

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For more information contact:

Office of the Deputy Director General, Healthcare
Purchasing and System Performance Division.
Department of Health, GPO Box 48, Brisbane QLD 4001.

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QH693 5/16





A message from the **Minister**

The Palaszczuk Government is committed to taking a genuine and considered approach to tackling waiting lists in Queensland across the whole patient journey from GP referral to outpatient appointments, diagnostic procedures and then any required surgery and recovery.

We are investing \$361.2 million over four years to provide more specialist outpatient appointments for Queenslanders and to fix known problems in key parts of the patient journey by 2020.

This Government is delivering Australia's first targets for specialist outpatient appointments by 2020. These targets will build on the efforts of our Hospital and Health Services (HHSs) to meet national targets for elective surgery and emergency department access.

We know too many people wait longer than the clinically recommended time to see a medical specialist. This has been a longstanding and systemic problem, so last year I convened two Waiting Time Summits with the single purpose of coming up with real answers to these problems. These Summits brought together a broad range of experts including clinicians, Chief Executives, GPs, Primary Health Networks, consumer representatives and other key stakeholders to find solutions.

As a result of these Summits, this strategy for reducing waiting times for specialist outpatient services across the State has been developed. It identifies key improvements that can be made to the patient journey. The strategy is a key element of our commitment to setting the strategic direction for the Queensland public health system under *My Health, Queensland's Future: Advancing Health 2026*.

Tackling the whole patient journey takes time. It requires a whole of system approach because resolving issues with one element of the journey has flow on impacts to other parts of the system such as diagnostic procedures.

We will invest in more appointments so you will get the right care at the right time. We will also invest in key system improvements so your journey is easier, more transparent and more effective.

I realise that there is a substantial challenge ahead of us but we will work together with you and your GPs, Primary Health Networks, Hospital and Health Services and front line hospital staff to implement this strategy.

In the meantime, if you are a patient in Queensland I want you to spend less time waiting for a specialist appointment, to have more control over your own healthcare and to experience a contemporary and connected health system—not to be languishing on a 'wait list'.

Reducing waiting times is not merely a rhetorical or political issue—it is central to our shared commitment to put the needs and expectations of our patients at the heart of health strategy in Queensland.

The Hon. Cameron Dick MP

Minister for Health and
Minister for Ambulance Services



Improving the **patient journey by 2020**

This strategy represents a unique opportunity to deliver significant benefits to Queenslanders waiting longer than clinically recommended for their initial specialist outpatient appointment. It will boost the capacity of the public health system to provide additional specialist appointments and healthcare services. This strategy will also address known difficulties experienced by people and their GPs trying to get to the right specialist service at the right time by targeting investments in key patient journey improvements.

This strategy will invest \$361.2 million to deliver improvements to you, the patient, by 2020:

- GPs will be able to refer you electronically to your local hospital.
- More specialist outpatient appointments will be available at your hospital so you will be seen sooner.
- You will have access to new models of care, for example allied health teams delivering care targeted to your diagnosis.
- You will have access to enhanced telehealth services allowing rural, regional and remote patients to access specialist care closer to home.
- You will be able to book your appointment online giving you more flexibility and choice.
- To make up for the additional people seeing specialists, we will provide more surgical appointments so your local hospital service will continue to provide surgical procedures within the clinically recommended time with appropriate follow up by specialists.
- We will also improve our monitoring of other pressure points in the patient journey, including accessing diagnostic procedures like endoscopies.
- Your GP, for the first time in Queensland, will have online access to clinical information about you and your treatment within your local hospital service. This means better follow-up care, more control over medications and more information about referrals to diagnostic procedures and elective surgery for you and your GP.
- GPs will be supported with new clinical decision making tools to inform better referral practices so all the information you need for your specialist appointment is in one place.
- GPs will have online access to a service directory which will tell them the types of specialist services available in each Queensland public hospital, so they can get you into the right clinic, first time.



Investing in key improvements in the patient journey

1. Developing consistent referral practices and standards across the state.
2. Service directory identifying services for your GP.
3. Electronic referral management systems.
4. New models of care.
5. More specialist outpatient services.
6. More telehealth specialist services.
7. Online booking tools.
8. Timely elective surgery will be provided.
9. Following elective surgery, clinically appropriate specialist follow-up care will be available—you will be supported throughout your journey.
10. GPs will be able to look at patient hospital information—your GP will be informed about your journey and your healthcare.
11. Performance measures that are transparent and regularly reported—you will know how long you will wait for specialist care.



Journey improvement 1: Your GP will be supported to make the best decisions for you

We know that improvements are needed at the first point in your journey when your GP is working out if seeing a specialist is the right thing for you.

Your GP is a highly trained and skilled doctor. GPs know when other health professionals need to be involved in your care. However, there are ongoing advances in medicine which means the types of test you might need and how quickly you need to see a specialist can change.

We will support your GP with new clinical decision support tools called ‘clinical prioritisation criteria’ (CPC) to ensure standard and comprehensive information is included in your referral. This will mean you do not wait unnecessarily, or undergo unnecessary testing, before seeing a specialist.

Key investment initiative: New clinical decision support tools

- From mid 2016, CPC for conditions most commonly referred by GPs will be available for use across Queensland.
- By early 2017, these CPC will be implemented in a metropolitan and a regional Hospital and Health Service area.
- By late 2018, CPC will be fully implemented across Queensland GPs and public hospitals.





Journey improvement 2: Your GP will know where to send you

Having determined you need to see a specialist, your GP wants to send you to the best place to get the right care for you. At the moment your GP may not know about new or expanded services in your community or local hospital.

We will provide your GP with access to an online service directory which will list the kinds of specialist services that are available for you and which hospital is providing them.

Key investment initiative: A statewide service directory

By 2020, GPs will have access to an online statewide directory of public hospital services to better inform and direct their referrals.



Journey improvement 3: Your referral will be sent to the right place first time

The process of referring you to our public hospital system has long been an area of frustration for GPs and patients.

The current referral processes rely on last century's technology—either your referral is posted or faxed to a hospital. This practice is not always without problems and errors: for example, letters can go to the wrong place and be first sent to your home address or get misplaced at a busy clinic. It is clear that different public hospitals have developed different process as to how paper referrals are tracked, clinically assessed and managed.

Queensland will implement modern solutions for managing this important step in the patient journey. We will invest in digital solutions to manage your referral so that it gets to the right place quickly and reduces the possibility for human error.

Key investment initiative: Electronic referral management systems

Phasing in from 2017, GP referrals will be submitted by secure electronic messaging to Queensland's largest public hospitals. This will deliver a smarter, more integrated patient referral tracking systems.



Journey improvement 4: New ways of providing optimal care for you

Your journey is unique to you. At the moment outpatient care in the public health system mostly relies on first seeing a specialist at a hospital.

There are many circumstances where your clinical outcomes can be significantly improved by engaging a broader set of health professionals. Under the guidance of a specialist, a range of services can be delivered directly to patients in a more timely and cost effective manner. For example, audiology clinics for ear, nose and throat, nurse led gastroenterology clinics, and specialist physiotherapy referrals. Building and implementing these models of care that are targeted to your clinical condition will mean you can get the right care sooner.

Key investment initiative: New models of care

Phasing in from 2017, there will be additional new models of care, including models using allied health, across Queensland.

“Many new allied health models of care have been introduced at Royal Brisbane and Women’s Hospital and have transformed patient care over recent years. These include several outpatient models of care, developed in conjunction with surgeons and physicians, where appropriate patients waiting to see specialists now have direct and timely access to allied health clinicians who can manage their problems and discharge them safely back into the community.”

Peter Buttrum,
Executive Director Allied Health Professions,
Royal Brisbane and Women’s Hospital



Journey improvement 5: More appointments—less waiting

In order for hospital services to move to ‘seen in time targets’ we are investing in clearing the current specialist outpatient long waiting list. To do this, we are investing in more services as well as better systems and processes.

This is about getting an appointment with the right health professional at the right time for you.

Our investment is making additional specialist outpatient services appointments available across the state.

This funding is being phased in to enable a realistic expansion of services. We need to ensure that as more patients are seen by a specialist and then referred on for further diagnostic treatment, or elective surgery, they can also be treated in a timely fashion. This will take time and there are no quick fixes.

We are also funding additional services across the state focused on a clinical specialty—ear, nose and throat (ENT). ENT is being targeted because too many people on specialist outpatient waiting lists, including children, need an appointment with ENT specialists.

In addition to this targeted investment, we are also funding Hospital and Health Services to deliver more specialist outpatient services and address their waiting lists.

Key investment initiative: More appointments across the public health system

By 2017, more patients will be seen within clinically recommended times and current long waits will be reduced.



ENT Case Study

At the beginning of January 2015, the demand for semi and non-urgent ENT outpatient appointments at Logan Hospital was three times greater than the service could manage.

Since then \$10.65m has been invested in an innovative, multidisciplinary model clinic to address this backlog. Specialists, audiologists, speech therapists and vestibular physiotherapy staff now work closely together to ensure patients receive the appropriate treatment much sooner.

This new shared-care model has significantly increased clinic capacity.

“*Our new model at Logan Hospital provides a significant increase in clinic capacity and, in a first for Australia, Logan Hospital will become a training hub for general practitioners to up-skill in ENT conditions.*”

Dr Bernie Whitfield
ENT specialist, Director of ENT and
Head and Neck Surgery,
Logan Hospital



Journey improvement 6: More appointments closer to home

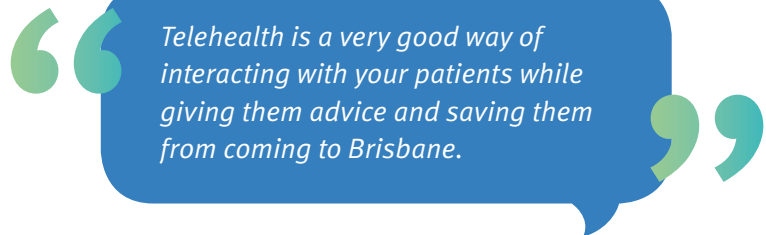
If you live in regional, rural or remote Queensland, the next stage of your journey will be to get an appointment close to home. Currently you may need to travel to see a specialist, who are predominantly located in large hospitals.

The expansion of telehealth services in rural and remote areas provides much needed care as close as possible to your home. This is better for you and better for the health system.

Investing in expanding the suite of telehealth services will mean you can receive specialist care closer to your home.

Key investment initiative: More telehealth specialist services for Queenslanders

By 2020, Queenslanders living in rural and remote areas will have greater access to specialist care via telehealth services.



Telehealth is a very good way of interacting with your patients while giving them advice and saving them from coming to Brisbane.

Dr Jason Jenkins
Director Vascular Surgery,
Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital.



Journey improvement 7: You will get an appointment at a time that suits you

The next step in your journey is getting a time to see your specialist—where it is important that the health system works with you.

We are investing in online tools that will give you greater flexibility in selecting your suitable date and time for a specialist outpatient appointment. We want you to be empowered to manage your own healthcare.

Key investment initiative: Online booking

By 2020, patients will have the ability to manage their specialist appointments online through the establishment of a patient portal, which will include all the necessary information relating to their specialist appointment.



Journey improvement 8: If required, you will get your elective surgery at the right time

As part of your journey you may require elective surgery. A key part of the specialist outpatient strategy is to invest in additional elective surgery to accommodate the patient flow resulting from more people seeing a specialist.

Key investment initiative:
Ensuring elective surgery is available

You will continue to get your elective surgery at the right time.



Journey improvement 9: You will continue to be supported in your journey

Your patient journey may involve diagnostic testing, elective surgery, or other management and treatment options. If your journey does include some of these elements then you may need follow-up or review appointments with your specialist; to either monitor the results of your elective surgery and/or diagnostic procedure, or to best manage your condition.

Key investment initiative:
Ensuring review appointments
are available if clinically required

We will take steps to enable your care to continue with the right person at the right time.



Journey improvement 10: Your GP will know about your hospital treatment

We know that improvements are needed at the end point in your journey so that you and your GP can make sure you get the right care after your appointment. Currently GPs only receive your discharge summary. Sharing information about your hospital experience with your GP is important to ensure you do not have any adverse reactions and re-admissions.

Your GP does not always immediately know if your specialist is recommending changes to your medication, or if you have been referred for further diagnostic procedures or on to surgery.

That is why we are investing in a web-based application to give your GPs real-time access to your medical information, such as pathology and radiology reports. Data available will also complement the information more traditionally included in patient discharge summaries.

Key investment initiative: Improving GP's access to hospital information

By 2018, Queensland GPs will have the ability to access components of their patient's public hospital medical record.



There is a need for real-time communication between referring GPs and specialists.

Dr Eleanor Chew
Past Chair Royal Australian College
of General Practitioners



Journey improvement 11: You will know how long you will wait

At the moment it is not clear to you how long you will wait for your treatment and that is why we will set clear, and publically available, targets for specialist outpatient services by 2020.



Specialist outpatient services—a **vital element of the patient journey**



Public specialist outpatient services

are a significant part of the healthcare system and a vital interface between acute inpatient and primary care services.

Through specialist outpatient services, patients get access to:

- Medical specialists for diagnostic assessment, screening and treatment.
- Ongoing management of chronic and complex conditions.
- Pre and post hospital care.

These services are historically provided in hospitals, the nature of which have evolved with changing population demographics and care needs, contemporary clinical practices and growing community expectations.

Advances in healthcare enable more services to be delivered safely and effectively without or with fewer nights spent in hospital. This can improve the patient experience and health outcomes significantly.

Consequently, demand for specialist outpatient appointments is growing and significant reforms are required with respect to how outpatient services are currently delivered in order to address this demand.

This strategy will invest in the current service capacity as well as support the healthcare system in responding to anticipated future health needs.

Investments under this strategy will improve patient access to specialist outpatient services, and help create increased system integration by using contemporary information management systems and innovative models of care.

These enhancements will allow all parts of the health system to work together and support patients in receiving the right care, at the right time and in the right place.

Improving the patient journey by creating a system that is integrated and focused on the needs of our patients is the fundamental goal of this strategy.



