

1. Essential and planned surgery waiting lists

Q. Will your party commit to ensuring supply and resources in addressing the lengthening surgical waitlist be maintained and increased according to demand? Will your party provide a transparent and detailed suite of novel and innovative ideas to manage the detrimental growing essential surgical waiting lists while ensuring safe hours are maintained for the surgical community and ensuring that the next generation of surgeons are adequately taught?

The Andrews Labor Government COVID Catch-Up Plan (the Plan) is investing a record \$1.5 billion to boost surgical activity across Victoria to record levels, providing the care which was deferred because of the global pandemic.

The Plan aims to deliver 125 per cent of our normal pre-pandemic surgical capacity. It will mean 40,000 extra surgeries in the next year, building up to record 240,000 surgeries every year in 2024. Our two dedicated public surgical centres – Frankston and Blackburn – are just the latest initiatives under the Labor Government’s \$1.5 billion Plan.

This work is occurring in close consultation with health services through Health Service Partnerships (HSPs) as well as consultation with workforce representatives, including unions and professional bodies.

Additionally, the Plan includes a focus on system reform, to ensure that our system is able to manage future demand in a safe and efficient manner through innovations such as increasing Same Day Surgery procedures and investing in alternative care pathways to ensure patients receive the right care at the right time, including referrals to non-surgical treatment options where it is deemed appropriate.

We are already engaging closely with a range of stakeholders, including the Royal College of Surgeons, to identify and test reform solutions to shape the planned surgery blueprint.

2. Surgical reform

Q: How does your party plan to build the future surgical workforce to address Victoria’s growing population and health needs as outlined?

As part of the COVID Catch-Up Plan, the Andrews Labor Government has committed to significant investment in supporting the workforce. This includes:

- Upskilling more than 1,000 nurses and theatre and sterilisation technicians.
- Supporting the training of an additional 400 perioperative nurses.
- Recruiting a further 2,000 highly skilled healthcare workers from overseas.

Additionally, it includes a focus on system reform, to foundationally transform the planned surgery system, now and into the future.

We are already engaging closely with a range of stakeholders, including the Royal College of Surgeons, to identify and test reform solutions to shape the planned surgery blueprint. Based on stakeholder engagement, the blueprint will consider long-term reforms to support workforce sustainability.

Since coming to office, the Andrews Labor Government has recruited 26,000 additional healthcare workers, including more than 4,800 additional doctors being added to the health system.

The Labor Government is training and hiring thousands of nurses and paramedics and making it free to study nursing and midwifery. Our healthcare workforce package will deliver free degrees, training

and upskilling for the next generation of nurses and midwives.

Further, in collaboration with the sector and industry stakeholders, we are developing a *Health Workforce Strategy*. Developed on the key themes of supply, capability, and wellbeing/safety, the Strategy will outline an approach for workforce recovery, development, and growth over the coming decade for all parts of the health workforce, including the central role of the surgical workforce.

Q: Will you work with hospitals and health services to create an environment conducive to safe and flexible training for surgical trainees?

The Labor Government is committed to working collaboratively with health services to best support the current and future workforce to ensure it has the capability and capacity to deliver planned surgery, now and into the future.

We are already working closely with stakeholders, including health services, to identify and test reform ideas to planned surgery, including a focus on the workforce. This engagement has commenced with targeted workshops, and will broaden to more expansive and public engagement in the new year.

Q. What actions will your party implement to ensure the well-being of the current and future health workforce?

In 2021, the Andrews Labor Government announced a \$32 million Healthcare Worker Wellbeing package which has been implemented across all Victorian public health services. This package provided funding to health services to implement their own wellbeing initiatives in consultation with their staff. Initiatives implemented as part of the program included the provision of proactive psychological support, creation of additional rest and recovery areas and practical supports for workers and their families including access to food and refreshments.

In addition, a \$353 million Winter Retention and Surge Payment was established to recognise the work of all clinical and non-clinical healthcare workers throughout the pandemic, and to incentivise staff to remain employed within the Victorian public health system during the challenging winter months. As part of this program, there was an additional \$13.2 million allocated to health services to provide access to free refreshments and meals for staff prioritising those working on night shift or doing double shifts (July-December 2022).

The Government is also implementing Occupational Violence and Aggression (OVA) de-escalation training for healthcare workers in Victorian health services. Online and face to face training courses are available for healthcare workers. This training commenced in October 2022 and will continue to be implemented until March 2023.

Victorian Doctors Health Program

- The Victorian Doctors Health Program (VDHP) was established in 2000 and provides confidential support for doctors and medical students with health concerns including alcohol, drugs and mental health issues.
- The services offered are sensitive to the needs of doctors, doctors in training and medical students. They are independent from employer programs, non-judgmental and dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of those within the profession.
- The VDHP was established by the former Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria, in partnership with the Australian Medical Association (AMA) Victoria. The VDHP Board comprises members appointed by AMA Victoria.

In April 2022, former Minister for Health Martin Foley MP announced an additional commitment of \$400,000 over the next two years to support the VDHP (2022-23 and 2023-24). The funding would assist the VDHP to expand the program to meet ongoing increased demand for its services.

Nursing and Midwifery Health Program Victoria

- The Nursing and Midwifery Health Program Victoria provides support to nurses, midwives and students experiencing issues relating to their health and wellbeing.
- Additional funding was secured in the 2022 – 2023 budget to enable the program to employ more counsellors and provide additional services to nurses, midwives and students.

Q. How will your party address the inequality in the provision of surgical healthcare for the rural community?

The Andrews Labor Government believes that all Victorians should have access to high quality healthcare, regardless of where they live.

In the *2022/23 Victorian Budget* we invested \$6.5 million to improve equity of surgical access for rural and regional Victorians by introducing a new state-of-the-art robot-assisted surgery service at Grampians Health.

We are already working closely and engaging with stakeholders, including rural and regional health services, to identify and test reform ideas to planned surgery, including a focus on the workforce across the state. This engagement has commenced with targeted workshops and will broaden to more expansive and public engagement in the new year.

The Labor Government established the Regional Health Infrastructure Fund (RHIF) in 2016 and the Metropolitan Health Infrastructure Fund (MHIF) in 2021. In addition, since coming into government, the Andrews Labor Government has invested \$280 million to replace critical medical equipment under the Medical Equipment Replacement Program (MERP) and approximately \$275 million as part of the Engineering Infrastructure Replacement Program (EIRP).

3. Infrastructure and surgical technology

Q. How will your party ensure that resources and supplies vital to the safe and uninterrupted function of healthcare facilities are maintained?

Global supply chains have become increasingly complex and problematic creating ongoing difficulties for many jurisdictions including Victoria.

The Government has a Supply Chain Taskforce for oversight of supply chain issues. The Taskforce includes representatives from the Department, HealthShare Victoria and Safer Care Victoria.

The Taskforce has supported the establishment of a Supply Chain Surety team within HealthShare Victoria to identify and manage supply chain issues as they arise. The Supply Chain Surety team is also developing a critical supplies register, with the objective of minimising the impact of supply chain disruption on the provision of patient care. The development of Victoria's critical supplies register is a key enabler to proactively managing supply chain risk.

Q. What will your party do to ensure public patients have access to the highest quality surgical technology?

The Andrews Labor Government has a vision for a world class Victorian health care system. In addition to supporting Grampians Health to procure a state-of-the-art surgical robot, supporting surgical capability for safe and high-quality care is also important. We have engaged the International Medical Robotics Academy to develop a Royal Australasian College of Surgeons endorsed robot-assisted surgery training program and we are developing a data collection framework, to inform future investment in this new surgical technology.

The Program also includes investment in new surgical equipment via the Surgical Equipment and Innovation Fund (SEIF) and Rapid Access Hubs (RAHs).

\$20 million has been investment through SEIF to enable health services across the state to upgrade their surgical equipment and diagnostic machines and support surgeons with the best equipment and technology.

Rapid Access Hubs are being established across metropolitan public hospitals allowing surgical theatres, equipment and staffing to be streamlined. The establishment of these hubs include significant investment in new equipment and technology.

The first eight hubs will be established in the next year at St Vincent's on the Park, Broadmeadows Hospital, Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital, Royal Women's Hospital, Werribee Mercy Hospital, Sandringham Hospital, the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, and Barwon Health.

In addition, the Labor Government continues to invest in hospital upgrades and expansions to deliver state of the art health facilities and technology for growing communities. This includes projects such as the New Footscray Hospital and the Frankston Hospital Redevelopment which will both deliver new theatres and associated technology.

4. Use of the title 'surgeon'

Q. Does your party support legislative change to protect the title of 'surgeon', and if so, will you commit to working with other Australian governments to ensure this is successful?

On 2 September 2022, the Health Ministers Meeting agreed to take urgent action to protect the title of 'surgeon' through legislative amendment to ensure doctors using this title have the requisite training.

This is part of a suite of reforms committed to by health ministers aimed at addressing concerns regarding cosmetic surgery, particularly the risks to consumers.

The Labor Government will continue to advocate strongly through the Health Ministers Meeting forum to ensure the protection of the use of the title 'surgeon'.

5. Victorian Audit of Surgical Mortality and Victorian Perioperative Consultative Committee

Q: The mortality audit program is part of an effective quality assurance activity to improve surgical care. The perioperative consultative committee aims to monitor, review and advise on matters in the operative and perioperative sphere to maintain the safe and efficient provision of surgical care to the community. RACS seeks a commitment from your party that support and funding of these entities will continue

The Andrews Labor Government has invested \$5 million to the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and is committed to the continuation of this relationship as it is invaluable to the critical work of the Victorian Perioperative Consultative Council, Victorian Audit of Surgical Mortality (VASM) program the College and Safer Care Victoria.

We are committed to the strengthening and continuous improvement in quality and safety in preoperative care.