

## Elective surgery: Questions and Answers

### **Why were changes made to elective surgery?**

In March, some changes were made to elective surgery as part of Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District's preparation and response to COVID-19. These changes meant, for the time being, our primary focus would be delivering safe care to patients requiring urgent surgery, as well as ensuring we maintained hospital capacity for an expected increase in demand, supplies of Personal Protective Equipment and staff safety.

During this time, emergency and trauma surgery has continued as well as a significant amount of urgent surgical cases, however there were some changes to less urgent cases, mainly urology and orthopaedics.

This allowed the District to free up theatre staff to be able to undertake specialised training so that they could be redeployed to work in intensive care if required. Having an increased number of appropriately trained staff was pivotal to the District being able to double our Intensive Care Unit ICU capacity, with the provision to triple capacity if needed.

### **What is happening now with elective surgery?**

The District's plan for the reintroduction of additional surgery has commenced, starting with Shellharbour Hospital. Teams there will be increasing the number of surgical procedures performed from this week.

This initial increase will enable us to focus on more category B and some Category C procedures at Shellharbour including orthopaedics, general surgery, ophthalmology and endoscopy procedures.

As always, patients will be clinically assessed and prioritised, as well as being risk assessed for admission during this period. We will be directly communicating with patients as we gradually expand our elective work.

### **When will there be further increases in elective surgery?**

Wollongong Hospital is already undertaking a significant amount of elective surgery, which will gradually increase in coming weeks. Shoalhaven Hospital will maintain its current level of surgery with increases to be considered in June.

The District will work with NSW Health to closely monitor activity to ensure that our hospitals can safely manage this recommencement along with the continuing preparations that are well underway to support the health system in responding to COVID-19.

This will include ongoing review and assessment of supplies and usage of personal protective equipment that keep both staff and patients safe, as well as continuing to significantly expand available ICU capacity and appropriately trained staff.

### **How will decisions be made about who receives surgery?**

Patients will be clinically assessed and prioritised based on the urgency and type of surgery, as well as increased pre-surgery assessment during this period. The decisions around urgency and priority are made around the treating specialist.

We will be contacting patients directly as we gradually expand our elective work.