

Thursday, 9 September 2021

ISLHD Intensive Care and COVID Ward capacity update

In line with Monday's announcement by the NSW Government of a stepped approach to increasing the state's Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and COVID ward capacity, the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District (ISLHD) has further strengthened local plans for projected demand over the coming months.

ISLHD Chief Executive Margot Mains said a peak in hospital bed and ICU utilisation across NSW is anticipated by late October/early November, with between 2,200 and 3,900 people likely to need hospitalisation, based on demand modelling outlined by the NSW Government.

"Like every Local Health District in NSW, we are further escalating our well established COVID plans in line with the stepped approach to increasing capacity across the entire NSW Health system. ISLHD has an important role to play in the overall strengthening of our health system, as we collectively work to ensure all patients in NSW receive the right care, in the right place, at the right time," she said.

Wollongong Hospital Intensive Care Unit capacity

Wollongong Hospital's COVID Intensive Care Unit is currently working at 75% of its level one capacity. This includes patients transferred from other LHDs, requiring higher level care. Bed capacity continues to be routinely allocated for local COVID patients, should the need arise.

A second COVID ICU is not required at this stage, however, an area dedicated for ICU two is ready and can be stood up to open within 12 hours if needed. This will be located within the hospital's existing Day Surgery area, which has been enabled by the postponement of some non-urgent elective surgery at Wollongong Hospital

"Once ICU two is established, our capacity will increase to around 30 beds with the possibility of 40. Of course, we are also working through the logistics of what additional expansion of ICU capacity at Wollongong may be possible, should the need arise," said Ms Mains.

Wollongong Hospital COVID Ward capacity

Wollongong Hospital's dedicated COVID Ward areas are currently working to around 30% of the dedicated COVID bed capacity. This includes patients transferred from other LHDs as well as local COVID positive cases, requiring hospital care. Bed capacity continues to be routinely allocated for additional local COVID patients, should the need arise.

“Wollongong’s capacity to care for COVID patients in a dedicated ward will increase to 74 beds over the next 3 weeks, by utilising the space that previously housed the COVID vaccination clinic. This has been enabled by the clinic’s relocation to the Mass Vaccination Centre in Wollongong CBD,” said Ms Mains.

Shoalhaven Hospital COVID capacity

At Shoalhaven Hospital, the team is working through the implementation of their COVID escalation plan for a dedicated COVID ICU and Ward, which includes the establishment of a Medical Respiratory COVID Ward.

“Shoalhaven will also relocate some beds from within the current Intensive Care Unit to the existing Recovery Unit for use as a non-COVID area. Plans are continually being developed to enable the team to safely care for COVID positive patients in other areas if the hospital, if the need arises,” said Ms Mains.

Virtual Community Care

Another incredibly important area, where our capacity continues to be increased is the District’s Virtual Community Care Centre.

“They are the teams looking after COVID positive patients in their own homes. The ISLHD team is managing local cases as well as patients from other LHDS, with a current capacity of 150. We are training additional staff to take our local virtual care capacity to at least 350, and beyond if required, in the weeks ahead,” said Ms Mains.

“I want to again reassure our community that every available resource within our LHD is being utilised in our health response.

“In addition to our incredibly hard-working and dedicated clinical staff, we also have teams of experts working around the clock who are continually updating, refining and escalating our COVID plans. Staff are undertaking additional training, they are redeploying to areas of greatest need within our service, and we are all continually developing innovations and enhancements to keep our community, and our staff, safe during this challenging time,” said Ms Mains.

“We are in this together, and we will get through this together,” she said.