

SA HEALTH

WINTER DEMAND PLAN 2025



Government of South Australia
SA Health



Our hospitals are busy year-round, but during the winter months, we see more people needing hospital care, often with complex health needs.

In addition, older South Australians are experiencing the longest waits in the nation for aged care placement.

This presents challenges for our hospitals, including longer wait times in emergency departments (EDs), delays in accessing inpatient beds, and extended hospital stays.

In 2024, our public hospitals faced unprecedented demand, including a surge in respiratory illnesses such as Influenza, COVID, and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), which significantly impacted hospital capacity.

Already this year we have more people becoming unwell with Influenza and Pertussis (Whooping Cough) than last year, and we expect this to increase.

Depending on the level of demand and severity of seasonal respiratory illnesses, we anticipate the need for an additional **100 to 150 beds this year**, and have plans in place to manage this.

To manage demand, we are delivering a range of initiatives under four priority areas:

1. **Keeping well in the community** - Promoting preventative health and wellbeing.
2. **Getting the right care, in the right place, in the appropriate time** - Including optimising use of alternative care pathways.
3. **High-impact interventions and increased capacity** - Including care models and additional bed capacity, to meet increased demand.
4. **Our people** - Supporting the wellbeing, capacity, and retention of our workforce.

These priority areas are underpinned by principles to support a sustainable plan:

- > **Demand forecasting:** Using data insights to anticipate demand, we can better allocate resources for planned and unplanned care.
- > **Additional capacity:** Implementing strategies to increase system capacity, including extra beds.
- > **Workforce planning:** Ensuring we have the right staff coverage and the workforce is supported.
- > **Collaboration and communication:** Strengthening partnerships and communication to improve patient care and system coordination.
- > **Learnings:** Continuously improving our response and preparing for the future.
- > **Monitoring and evaluation:** Tracking and assessing our strategies to ensure they are effective and adaptable, using data-driven insights, collaboration, and strong partnerships, to drive improvement.

Every individual in our healthcare system, from ambulance officers and nurses to doctors, allied health professionals, administration, and support staff, work tirelessly year-round, especially during periods of high demand.

We appreciate their dedication and commitment to providing the best possible care to our community.

1. Keeping well in the community

Promoting preventative health and wellbeing initiatives helps people maintain their health in the community. Offering accessible programs and resources empowers people to take proactive steps to maintain their health and wellbeing.

SA Health will deliver this priority by:

- > Promoting immunisation programs to reduce the burden of flu and other respiratory illnesses, minimise preventable hospitalisations, and protect healthcare workers and vulnerable people:
 - Promoting influenza vaccination.
 - Promoting the RSV maternal and infant protection program for eligible people ahead of the winter season, to protect against serious illness from RSV (Commonwealth program for pregnant women available from 3 February, State program for infants from 1 April 2025).
- > Public campaigns to support people to find appropriate treatment options in the community.
- > Partnering with *healthdirect* to:
 - Expand the after-hours GP service to connect SA callers to a virtual GP 24/7, including overnight support for residents in aged care homes.
 - Connect SA callers to virtual care services for comprehensive assessment and management, including referrals to Priority Care Centres (PCCs) or Medicare Urgent Care Clinics.
- > Preventive Health SA is implementing evidence-based policy and programs to improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities:
 - Policy and legislative initiatives across obesity prevention, tobacco and e-cigarettes, alcohol and other drugs, mental health and wellbeing, suicide prevention, and the determinates of health.
 - Public health communication campaigns.
 - Better Health Coaching Service, the free, evidence based, confidential telephone coaching service which supports South Australians to be active, eat well and reduce the risk of chronic disease.
- > Enhancing pharmacy services to increase care available in the community with:
 - Expanding the 24/7 pharmacy roll out, with a fourth 24/7 pharmacy opening this year.
 - SA Pharmacy prescribing pharmacists to commence at the Royal Adelaide Hospital and continuing at Lyell McEwin Hospital and Flinders Medical Centre.
 - Continuing the SA Community Pharmacy Urinary Tract Infection (UTIs) Services and Oral Contraceptive Pill (OCP) Resupply Services.
 - South Australians can now receive recommended travel vaccinations from a trained community pharmacist.
 - Increased access to palliative care medicines, support, and advice in community pharmacies.
 - The Post-Discharge Medication Service will assist people returning home from hospital in managing their medicines.



2. Getting the right care, in the right place, in the appropriate time

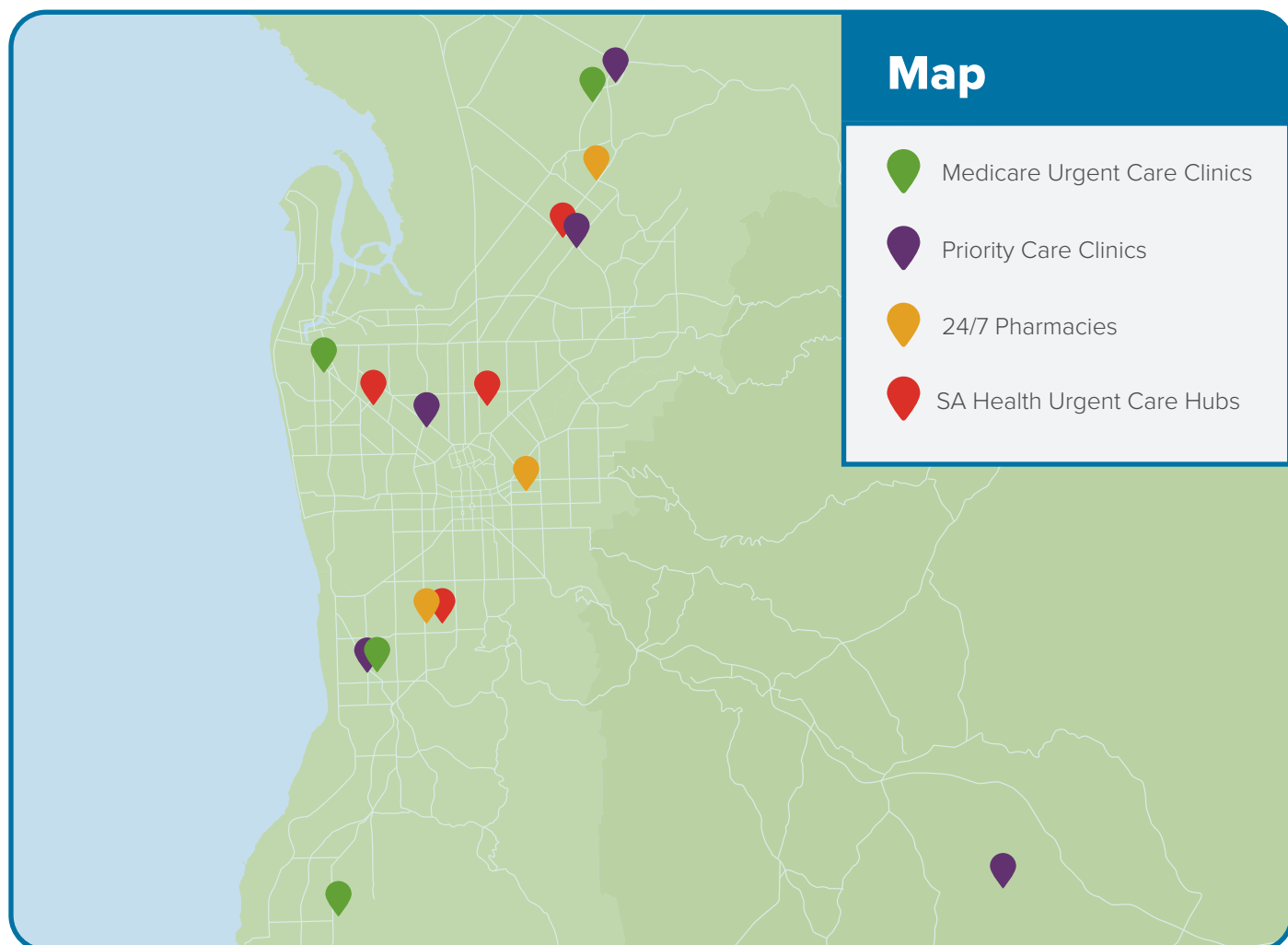
Improved coordination and navigation will ensure that patients receive the most appropriate care by making the best use of available care pathways.

SA Health will deliver this priority by:

- > Recruiting more clinicians for SA Ambulance Service (SAAS) in July 2025 to provide frontline clinical support and increase capacity to provide 24/7 response to the community, with an additional:
 - 16 Paramedics in the metropolitan area.
 - 12 Paramedics in the Upper Yorke Peninsula by providing a dedicated 24/7 emergency resource to support existing volunteer and career crews, plus the first Community Paramedic on Yorke Peninsula.
 - 6 Paramedics and 6 Ambulance Officers across Whyalla and Port Augusta to support existing resources.
- > Maximising virtual care to improve access to care with:
 - Expansion of SAAS Paramedic led Clinical Telephone Assessment, with additional clinicians in July 2025, to help manage triple zero (000) calls and assist patients in accessing alternative care options.
 - Targeted communication and engagement strategy with Residential Aged Care Facilities (RACFS) to increase referrals to SA Virtual Care Services (SAVCS).
- > Expanding use of alternative care pathways to ensure appropriate patients are directed to services in the community, including:
 - Enhanced integration and navigation to increase coordination and accessibility.
 - Increased community nursing hours.
 - Increased capability and wider criteria for Nurse-Led Clinics.
 - Improved access to primary care and ambulatory clinics.
 - Extended Child and Adolescent Urgent Virtual Care Service (CAVUCS) operating hours.
 - Increased SAAS referrals to PCCs to avoid unnecessary transports to hospital.



- Maximised PCC referrals for eligible patients presenting to ED, and increased SAAS referrals to PCCs to avoid unnecessary transports to hospital.
- Nurse practitioners in primary health care settings (three placements in metro, two in regional).
- Maximised use of SALHN Complex and Restorative (CARE) service through direct referrals from SAAS.
- > Maximising the use of SA Health urgent care hubs located in Daw Park, Woodville, Sefton Park, and the recently opened Elizabeth Vale, which provide multidisciplinary rapid assessment and urgent care for patients who have care needs that are unable to be met by primary care or community services and can safely receive care in a community healthcare setting.
- > Partnering with the Commonwealth Government and Adelaide Primary Health to make it easier for South Australians to get urgent treatment at Medicare Urgent Care Clinics, taking pressure of EDs.
- > Maximising use of the Hospital in the Home service, including implementation of a Nurse Practitioner role 7 days a week in WCH@Home.
- > Improving access to community care options for our older population, including:
 - Campaign to promote availability of healthdirect.
 - Working with primary care and urgent care services to enhance care for older adults.
 - Working with Dementia Support Australia to deliver the Hospital to Aged Care Dementia Support Program, providing support to optimise their quality of life both in hospital and when transitioning between care settings.
 - Support aged care home residents to receive care-in-place when appropriate and ensure effective wrap around supports to assist transition from hospital to the community and vice-versa.



3. High-impact interventions and increased capacity to support demand

Delivering evidence-based, high-impact interventions and increased bed capacity through focused, collaborative efforts with multi-disciplinary care and system-wide support to:

- > reduce wait times and overcrowding in EDs
- > shorten hospital stays and improve bed availability
- > ensure patients are discharged promptly and able to return home as soon as it is safe.

SA Health will deliver this priority by:

- > Opening more than **160 additional beds this year** including:
 - A new **24 bed** transitional care service in **March 2025** in the Pullman Adelaide, supporting medically stable patients needing maintenance care, post-surgery recovery, or awaiting transition to another service across metropolitan and peri-urban regions.
 - a **20 bed** Memory Support Unit at Hampstead Rehabilitation Centre (as part of CO-ACT – in addition to 50 already opened in recent months) and **12 bed** Acute Surgical Unit at Lyell McEwin Hospital in **mid-2025**.
 - **24 beds** (Medical and Surgical) at The Queen Elizabeth Hospital and **12 beds** (Mental Health) at Margaret Tobin Centre in **mid-2025**.
 - **24 beds** (Mental Health) at The Queen Elizabeth Hospital and **48 beds** (24 General Medical and 24 Mental Health) at Noarlunga Hospital in **late 2025**.
- > In addition to inpatient capacity, opening an extra **21 treatment bays** in EDs to support patient flow, including:
 - **15 treatment bays** at Southern Fleurieu Health Service and 6 treatment bays at Mount Gambier Hospital in **mid-2025**.
 - Increasing capacity of My Home Hospital with up to an additional **30 beds** and maximising utilisation through direct 24/7 referrals.
 - Establishing in-hospital strategies to support patient access to out-of-hospital services (like My Home Hospital) when these are most appropriate for the patient.
 - Maximising use of the Statewide Interfacility Transfer Process (SIFT) which provides a consistent, statewide process to support the transfer of patients between facilities – including return to regional hospitals, community-based and rehabilitation care.
 - Expanding the Regional Operations Centre (formerly Patient Flow Hub) to increase transfer of patients from metro to regional hospitals, or seek appropriate alternative discharge and care pathways, supported by SIFT. This includes:
 - Developing specific pathways for earlier transfer from metro to regional hospitals.
 - Matching patients who no longer require metro hospital care with aged care vacancies in regional hospitals.



Concept image 24-bed Medical Inpatient Unit at Noarlunga Hospital



Concept image 24-bed Mental Health Rehabilitation Unit at Noarlunga Hospital

- > Continuing elective surgeries and minimising cancellations through:
 - Targeted scheduling of non-urgent cases to smooth peaks in elective workload and distribute daily demand more evenly.
 - Continued collaboration with private hospitals and day procedure centres.
- > Distributing demand during peak periods with:
- > Women's and Children's Health Network supporting paediatric demand at Flinders Medical Centre and Lyell McEwin Hospital when needed.
- > Streamlined processes for mental health consumers transferring from regional to metropolitan areas to enhance consumer experiences, boost capacity, and improve flow and service coordination, through the Mental Health Improvement Program and Mental Health Regional Patient Pathway.
- > Supporting vulnerable members of our community and working to address the high volume of discharge-ready aged care and disability patients who are stuck in our hospitals:
 - Partnering with the Commonwealth and Aged Care sector to improve transitions in care for older people and reducing avoidable hospital admissions.
 - Increasing referrals to supportive discharge pathways for aged care and respite patients, including the Discharge for Respite program and Care of the Older Person and Community Transition program.
 - Increasing the role of the Metropolitan Referral Unit (MRU) over winter and working with the Commonwealth Government to support hospital avoidance of long-term complex patients and facilitate discharge and assessment to ensure continued long term hospital avoidance.



4. Our people

Our workforce is our greatest asset, and we are committed to supporting the wellbeing, capacity, and retention of our workforce, enabling them to thrive in their roles and continue providing exceptional care to the community.

SA Health will deliver this priority by:

- > Enhancing workforce flexibility and maintaining optimal staffing levels through coordinated leave planning, increased centralised casual nursing workforce, and using the casual allied health staff during high demand.
- > Providing upskilling and training opportunities to support professional growth and enable our staff to work at their full scope of practice:
 - Increasing the number of participants in the Mental Health Graduate Program and mental health enrolled nurse support program to bolster our mental health workforce.
 - Upskilling our patient journey coordinators across the peri-urban region.
- > Strengthening workplace wellbeing through:
 - Increasing access to free vaccines for staff.
 - Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to reduce the spread of respiratory viruses. Public awareness through the 'Abuse shouldn't be part of the job' campaign, ensuring our staff are supported when caring for the community.
 - Promoting health and safe systems and good work design; ensuring the physical and mental wellbeing of staff.
 - Improving workforce capability by supporting staff to work to their full scope of practice and providing the necessary resources.

Our focussed, strategic planning has our workforce at the centre, addressing challenges in partnership with them, to enhance our response to the South Australian community.

For more information

Health Service Programs

Clinical System Support & Improvement

Department for Health and Wellbeing

CitiCentre Building, 11 Hindmarsh Square

Adelaide 5000 SA

www.sahealth.sa.gov.au



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