Government of South Australia
SA Health

IMPROVING ACCESS TO ELECTIVE SURGERY

Our plan for South Australians

- Better patient experiences
- Faster, fairer access to elective surgery
- Safe and quality care, closer to home

ELECTIVE SURGERY IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

What is elective surgery?

Elective *(or planned)* surgery refers to procedures that are booked in advance, separate from emergency procedures.

Patients needing elective surgery are placed on a waiting list and assigned to Category 1, 2, or 3, depending on how urgently the surgery is required.

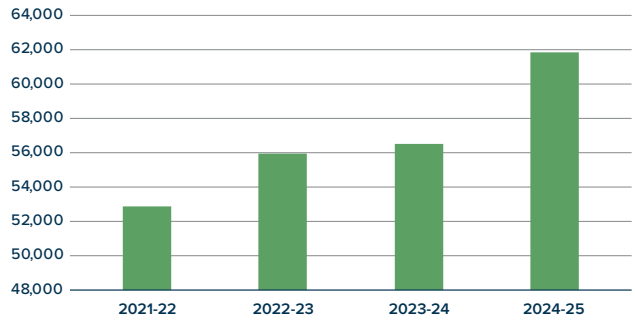
We're doing more surgeries than ever before

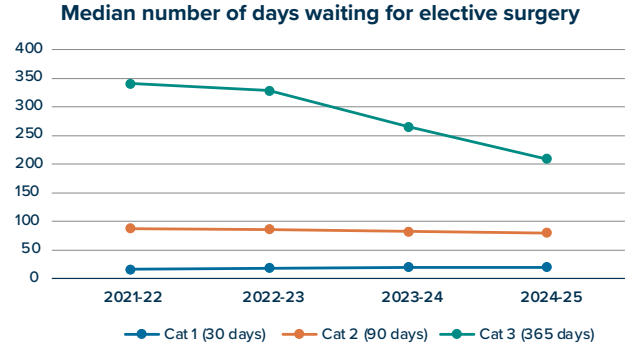
More South Australians than ever before are undergoing elective surgery through South Australia's public health system each year, demonstrating our commitment to meeting growing community need:

Almost **62,000 elective surgeries were completed in 2024/25** - a **9% increase** compared with the previous year.

Surgical activity has grown by 17% over the past three years, thanks to major investments in our staff and hospital facilities

Patients are waiting less time for surgery, with the biggest improvements seen in Category 3 procedures, and continued progress across Categories 1 and 2.



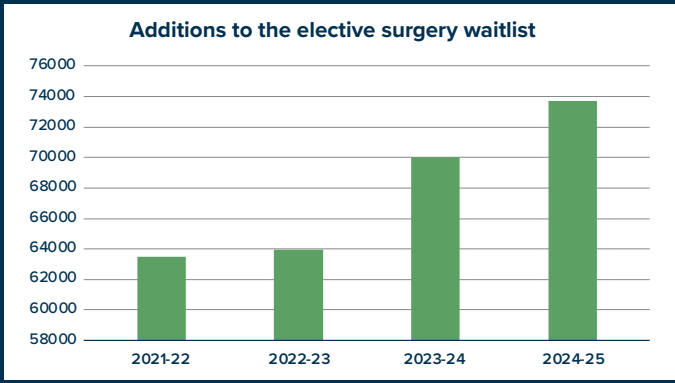


Data note: Median waiting time represents the middle value, that is half of patients waited less time and half waited longer).

Meeting growing demand

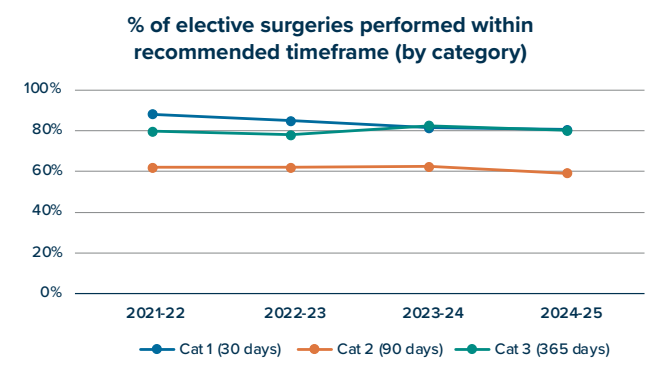
More South Australians are accessing elective surgery than ever before, driven by:

- An ageing population who are living longer, more active lives.
- Medical advances that make it possible to treat conditions previously considered untreatable.
- Greater capability to care for patients with more complex health needs.



Although the number of surgeries completed has grown significantly, supported by continued investment, we are still facing challenges, including:

- Growing elective surgery care waitlists driven by increased demand.
- An increase in the number of overdue patients on the waitlist.



This growing demand presents an opportunity to transform how we deliver surgical care across South Australia.

Our plan will deliver evidence-based, long-lasting reform that is needed to ensure the safe, timely, and equitable delivery of elective surgery care for all South Australians.

OUR PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

WORKING TOGETHER FOR BETTER CARE: OUR PRIORITY ACTIONS

We'll develop these reforms with patients, clinicians, Local Health Networks, primary care providers, professional organisations, and private sector partners. We'll continue to work collaboratively to deliver better care for all South Australians.

More day surgeries so patients can go home the same day

Programs like My Home Hospital and Virtual Care now help more patients recover safely at home after surgery. Next, we'll expand same-day surgery to more types of operations and increase our high-volume theatre capacity so patients get surgery faster.

Better coordination between hospitals and GPs

We're partnering with primary care partners to co-design new clinical pathways for key procedures and testing alternatives to surgery, like allied health support, to reduce pressure on surgical services. Improved digital systems will make it easier for hospitals and GPs to share information and work together.

More healthcare services delivered virtually

Patients can now access remote monitoring after surgery and virtual clinics across all Local Health Networks. Next, we'll expand virtual pre-surgery appointments and follow-up reviews statewide and include remote monitoring in recovery programs.

Consistent, evidence-based care throughout the surgical journey

We've implemented Enhanced Recovery After Surgery protocols across major hospitals and are developing a framework for pre-surgery care. Next, we'll create standard clinical pathways for common procedures and expand programs that help patients prepare physically for surgery to improve recovery.

Fairer, more transparent management of surgery waitlists

We now have real-time dashboards to track surgical waitlists, improving reporting and data quality. Next, we'll establish statewide waitlist oversight, strengthen data sharing between Local Health Networks and the Department for Health and Wellbeing, and provide clearer information to patients about their wait times.

Care closer to home through better coordination and public-private partnerships

We're helping more South Australians get care locally by using hospital capacity more efficiently and partnering across the health system, including stronger regional services. Partnered Care Pathways are public-private partnerships ensuring patients access timely surgery and safe recovery. Next, we'll improve patient flow between hospitals, align regional and metro surgical models, and help regional patients return home to recover sooner.

Using advanced technology including surgical robots

We're using advanced technology to improve surgical precision, safety, and efficiency. The Royal Adelaide Hospital introduced robotic-assisted surgery in 2024 for selected procedures. Next, we'll create a statewide robotics plan, expand access to more specialties, and provide staff training and accreditation.

Simpler specialist referral process

We've introduced Clinical Prioritisation Criteria and electronic referral systems for key specialties. Next, we'll expand these systems and connect digital referral and booking platforms to improve access to both surgical and non-surgical options, so patients receive the right care at the right time.

DELIVERING CHANGE

These actions will reduce waiting lists, improve patient care, and help the system run more smoothly.

- **Immediate priorities** focus on improving waitlist management and governance.
- **Medium-term priorities** include streamlining referrals, expanding innovative surgical models, and building stronger public-private partnerships.
- **Longer-term initiatives** will modernise infrastructure, workforce, and digital systems.

Our initial focus areas are:

- Expanding theatre access.
- Prioritise patients by clinical need.
- Deliver patient centred care across the whole surgical journey.
- Use digital tools effectively.
- Implement consistent, evidence-based pathways.
- Support and grow our skilled workforce.

LOOKING AHEAD

By delivering the right care, in the right place, at the right time, we're building a surgical system that works better for all South Australians.

Patients will experience:

- Faster access to surgery.
- Fairer pathways based on clinical need.
- More options, including non-surgical alternatives.
- Care closer to home through regional and virtual services.
- Better outcomes through evidence-based care.

This transformation supports our workforce, strengthens our health system, and ensures every South Australian receives appropriate surgical care.

SUSTAINING PROGRESS

Work is already underway, with SA Health partnering with stakeholders to co-design the path forward.

Our staged approach:

- Delivering rapid improvements where ready.
- Co-designing comprehensive strategies with Local Health Networks and partners over the next 12 months to address priority areas.
- Focus resources where they'll have the greatest impact.

This ensures South Australians see real improvements sooner, while we build a stronger, more sustainable surgical system for the future.

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Government of South Australia
SA Health

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