

Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA

Minister for Health

Minister for Mental Health

Minister for Finance

Minister for the Public Service

Member for Kurrajong

RESPONSE TO QUESTION ON NOTICE**Questions on Notice Paper No 7****16 May 2025****Question No. 468****MR SHANE RATTENBURY MLA:** To ask the Minister for Health

- 1) In relation to a question asked by Mr Rattenbury in the Chamber on 4 February 2025 of which some of the response was responded to as a question taken on notice that included “ACT residents who access CHS (Canberra Health Services) Dental with dental pain are offered the next available emergency dental appointment in house or may be offered a voucher to treat their presenting concern with a partnered private provider, how many patients presenting with dental pain at CHS Dental are offered a voucher to treat their presenting concern with a partnered private provider.
- 2) What are the considerations associated with referring patients rather than offering next available treatment.
- 3) Has there been work to consider expanding the capacity available to provide more services in-house.
- 4) What is the difference in cost associated with in-house treatment and referral to alternative private providers, noting there are obviously a range of treatments, and can the Minister provide examples based on common presenting issues.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH MLA - The answer to the Member’s question is as follows:

- 1) The number of patients offered an emergency voucher for dental treatment with a CHS Dental partnered private provider from 1 July 2024 to 30 April 2025 was 2,146.



It should be noted that this number includes patients that fail to attend (FTA) and vouchers that are not used (there is no charge for these).

2) The following is considered when determining if the patient requiring emergency treatment should be offered the next in-house available appointment or an emergency partnered private provider voucher.

- Does the patient require an interpreter?

All patients requiring the support of an interpreter service are provided in-house emergency dental appointments only.

- Is the patient under 18 years?

All patients under the age of 18 years are provided in-house emergency dental appointments only.

- Has the patient been offered more than three emergency dental vouchers over the previous 12-month period?

If so, the patient is provided an in-house emergency dental appointment only.

- Is the patient part of the Targeted Access Program (TAP) or do they have special needs?

If yes, patients are provided in-house emergency dental appointments only.

3) CHS Dental provides emergency dental appointments at all five CHS clinics. All in-house appointment bookings ensure that each dentist and oral health therapist has at least three quarantined, emergency dental appointments each day. On average there are 66 scheduled in-house emergency appointments each week.

The CHS Dental emergency voucher program with partnered private providers ensures Canberrans can receive emergency dental care within an acceptable timeframe. This collaboration and long-standing partnership prioritises patient-centered care and supports public dental services in the ACT.

CHS Dental consider that one of its primary functions is ensuring that Canberrans who are most vulnerable can access urgent dental care through a variety of different services. CHS Dental deliver care at the Alexander Maconochie Centre three days per week, where majority of presentations are triaged as emergency in nature. Services on the Residential Aged Care Facility Mobile Dental Clinic also address emergency dental concerns.

To ensure the eligible ACT community continue to access dental services into the future, CHS Dental are reviewing and considering population projections and predicted staffing requirements over the next 20 years. A major component of this activity is infrastructure requirements, including planning upgrades of existing facilities and as part of the planning for the new health centres across the ACT region. These changes will enhance the dental experience for clients with special needs through improved access, flexibility, adaptive equipment and treatment options.

4) Partnered private providers must adhere to an approved public sector scope of dental treatment/practice. This includes strict billing and treatment requirements.

CHS Dental emergency appointments cost an eligible patient \$50.85 (current fee as of 30 May 2025). This entitles the patient to a single internal or external emergency dental appointment. During this appointment, the patient's main complaint will be assessed and treatment provided as indicated. Other concerns will be addressed at scheduled appointments when appropriate. A partnered private provider can bill from a select list of eligible treatment items to the emergency external voucher cap amount of \$600. If treatment will exceed this cap, the private provider contacts CHS Dental for approval. However, the cost to the patient remains the same, regardless of the item numbers billed during an emergency dental appointment.

Common emergency dental presentations include but are not limited to dental trauma, lost fillings, toothache overnight and or not relieved by pain medication, facial swelling, post dental extraction pain and or bleeding.

Approved for circulation to the Member and incorporation into Hansard.



Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA
Minister for Health

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This response required 6hrs 35mins to complete, at an approximate cost of \$966.22.