

MEDIA RELEASE

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Health care workers taking the hit for government inaction

AMA Queensland has called on state and federal governments to do more to reverse a dramatic rise in assaults against health care workers.

Figures released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare show assaults were the second leading cause of injury hospitalisations among health care workers in 2024-25, up from fourth in 2015-16.

15% of injuries were from assaults by bodily force, trailing falls on 36%. By comparison, assaults were the seventh-most common cause of hospitalisation among the general public.

President Associate Professor Erica Gannon said the stark statistic reflects the increasing pressure on doctors, nurses, paramedics and other workers just trying to do their job.

"Doctors and their fellow health professionals have the right to be safe at work in order to deliver the best possible care to patients," she said.

"This AIHW report reinforces what our members have been telling us – that violence is rising not just in overstretched public emergency departments but in wards, private hospitals and specialist clinics.

"There is never an excuse for assault, but we know staff shortages and long wait times increase the risk that patients will become agitated and lash out.

"The anxiety and frustration of waiting can be particularly hard for patients with medical conditions like dementia and mental and cognitive impairment."

Assoc Prof Gannon said AMA Queensland has been sounding the alarm about the deeper ramifications of Australia's medical workforce shortage.

"Doctors are rightly furious when they see colleagues attacked for doing their job," she said.

"How are we going to attract and retain more health care staff if they believe serious injury simply comes with the territory?"

Assoc Prof Gannon said Federal Health Minister Mark Butler's recent campaign against specialists would add fuel to the fire.

"By targeting specialist fees, the federal government has wilfully stirred up suspicion and distrust of highly trained medical professionals," she said.

"Both sides of politics have failed to properly invest in our public hospitals and increase Medicare rebates to reflect the rising cost of healthcare, yet they have waived through increases to private health insurance premiums."

AMA Queensland will launch its annual Resident Hospital Health Check in the coming months and for the first time there will be a parallel survey for senior medical officers. Both will capture public hospital doctors' experiences in our system, including occupational violence.