

6 Outpatient care

This chapter presents information on outpatient services and other non-admitted, non-emergency patient services provided by public hospitals in Australia (detailed information on non-admitted patient emergency department care for Australia's public hospitals is given in *Chapter 5* of this report).

What data are reported?

National Public Hospital Establishments Database

Data on outpatient-related occasions of service and group sessions were also sourced from the National Public Hospital Establishments Database (NPHEd) which has essentially full coverage of public hospitals (see *Appendix 2*). Data on non-admitted patient care activity for the NPHEd are collected for 14 non-admitted patient service types. In addition to outpatient services, these service types cover a range of non-admitted patient care services that are not in scope for the NOCD.

National Outpatient Care Database

The National Outpatient Care Database (NOCD) is a compilation of summary data for outpatient clinic occasions of service in public hospitals. The data supplied are based on the National Minimum Data Set (NMDS) for Outpatient care, as defined in the *National health data dictionary, version 14* (HDSC 2008). These data were provided to the AIHW for 2008–09 as counts of individual occasions of service and group sessions for 24 types of outpatient clinics.

The scope for the Outpatient care NMDS for 2008–09 was for services provided to non-admitted, non-emergency patients registered for care in outpatient clinics of public hospitals that were classified as either peer group A (*Principal referral and Specialist women's and children's hospitals*) or B (*Large hospitals*) in *Australian hospital statistics 2007–08* (AIHW 2009a). The public hospital peer group classification was developed for the cost per casemix-adjusted separation analysis based on admitted patient activity (see *Appendix 1*).

For 2008–09, all states and territories were able to provide summary data to the NOCD for all public hospitals in peer groups A and B that managed outpatient clinic services. Some states and territories also provided outpatient care data for public hospitals which were classified to other peer groups:

- New South Wales provided data for two *Medium hospitals*
- Victoria provided data for one *Medium hospital*
- Western Australia provided data for six *Medium hospitals*, two *Small remote acute hospitals*, one *Small non-acute hospital* and one *Mothercraft hospital*
- South Australia provided data for one *Medium hospital*
- Tasmania provided data for 1 *Medium hospital*, the Mersey Community Hospital.

These data have also been included in analyses of NOCD data presented in this chapter.

While the proportion of individual outpatient occasions of service and group sessions for which clinic-level data were available was 100% for peer groups A and B, coverage for all public hospitals was only about 79% for individual occasions of service and 63% for group sessions (see Table S6.1).

Box 6.1 What are the limitations of the data?

When interpreting the data presented, the reader should note the following:

- The data presented are counts of occasions of service, not persons. A person may have multiple occasions of service, at a variety of outpatient clinics or departments reported in a reference year.
- States and territories may differ in the extent to which outpatient services are provided in non-hospital settings (such as community health services) which are beyond the scope of the NPHED and NOCD.
- There is considerable variation among states and territories and between reporting years in the way in which non-admitted patient occasions of service data are collected for the NPHED. Differing admission practices between the states and territories also lead to variation among jurisdictions in the services reported.
- Data from the NOCD should be interpreted with caution as the data may not be representative of outpatient clinic activity for hospitals that were not required to provide data for the NOCD. While the proportion of individual outpatient-related occasions of service and group sessions for which clinic-level data were available was 100% for peer group A (*Principal referral and Specialist women's and children's hospitals*) and B (*Large hospitals*) coverage for all public hospitals was only about 79% for individual occasions of service and 63% for group sessions.
- NOCD data should be interpreted with caution as the comparability of the data may be influenced by variation in admission practices, the type of facility providing these services and in the allocation of outpatient services to the 24 clinic types among the states and territories.
- For Western Australia, counts of outpatient group sessions reported to the NOCD actually reflect the number of individuals who attended group sessions. The data for Western Australian group sessions are therefore not directly comparable to the data provided for group sessions presented for other states and territories.

Box 6.2: What methods were used?

Readers should note the following:

- For the purposes of aligning the two data sources, outpatient-related occasions of service sourced from the NPHED refer to occasions of service and group sessions reported with a Type of non-admitted patient service of *Allied health, Dental, Dialysis, Endoscopy and related procedures* and *Other medical/surgical/obstetric*.
- Other non-admitted patient service types reported to the NPHED analysed in this chapter include the service types of, *Alcohol and other drugs, Community health services, District nursing, Mental health, Other outreach services, Pathology, Pharmacy and Radiology and organ imaging*.
- The number of occasions of service for the non-admitted patient service type *Accident and emergency* are not presented in this chapter and were discussed in *Chapter 5* of this report (see Table 5.3).
- The coverage of the NOCD clinic-level data is calculated as the number of outpatient occasions of service reported to the NOCD divided by the number of outpatient-related occasions of service, as defined above, from the NPHED, expressed as a percentage. Where the number of occasions of service reported to the NOCD is greater than the number of outpatient-related occasions of service reported to the NPHED, the proportion is presented as 100%.

How has activity changed over time?

Table 6.1 shows the number of individual occasions of service for outpatient-related services and other non-admitted patient services reported to the NPHED for public acute hospitals between 2004–05 and 2008–09.

Between 2004–05 and 2008–09, outpatient care delivered in specialist outpatient clinics increased by an average of 1.7% per year with *Endoscopy and related procedures* showing the largest relative increase in number of individual occasions of service. Over the same time period *Pharmacy, Pathology and Radiology and organ imaging* services increased by 10.1% per year; *Mental health* and *Alcohol & drug* services decreased by 2.5% per year; and *Community health, Outreach* and *District nursing* services decreased by about 6% per year (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Number of individual occasions of service^(a) for outpatient and other non-admitted patient services, public acute hospitals, 2004–05 to 2008–09

Type of service	2004–05	2005–06	2006–07	2007–08	2008–09	Change (per cent)	
						Ave since 2004–05	Since 2007–08
Outpatient care							
Allied health	4,357,567	3,681,164	3,659,763	3,715,798	3,751,560	-3.7	1.0
Dental	1,281,359	1,134,303	1,084,156	1,034,822	775,382	-11.8	-25.1
Dialysis	14,958	10,079	32,798	25,319	25,612	14.4	1.2
Endoscopy and related procedures	15,675	25,991	24,429	46,995	57,885	38.6	23.2
Other medical/surgical/obstetric ^(b)	9,759,964	10,073,999	11,031,151	11,545,782	11,905,566	5.1	3.1
<i>Total outpatient occasions of service</i>	<i>15,429,523</i>	<i>14,925,536</i>	<i>15,832,297</i>	<i>16,368,716</i>	<i>16,516,005</i>	<i>1.7</i>	<i>0.9</i>
Pharmacy, Pathology, Radiology and organ imaging	11,596,677	14,462,913	14,909,645	16,212,632	17,065,627	10.1	5.3
Mental health, Alcohol & drug	2,760,745	3,079,504	3,154,917	3,078,262	3,042,035	2.5	-1.2
Community health, Outreach and District nursing	6,863,238	5,953,122	5,502,733	5,594,899	5,365,453	-6.0	-4.1
Total non-admitted patient occasions of service	36,650,183	38,421,075	39,399,592	41,254,509	41,989,120	3.5	1.8

Note: See Boxes 6.1 and 6.2 for notes on data limitations and methods.

(a) Reporting arrangements have varied significantly across years and across jurisdictions.

(b) *Other medical/surgical/obstetric* includes the outpatient services of *Gynaecology, Obstetrics, Cardiology, Endocrinology, Oncology, Respiratory, Gastroenterology, Medical, General practice primary care Paediatric, Plastic surgery, Urology, Orthopaedic surgery, Ophthalmology, Ear, nose and throat, Chemotherapy, Paediatric surgery and Renal medical.*

Source: National Public Hospital Establishments Database.

How much patient activity was there in 2008–09?

Table 6.2 shows the number of individual occasions of service for outpatient-related services and other non-admitted patient services reported to the NPHED for public acute hospitals by state and territory.

In 2008–09, public hospitals provided almost 42 million service episodes for non-admitted patients.

- 16.5 million service episodes were delivered in specialist outpatient clinics with the chief contributors being *Medical/surgical/obstetric, Allied health* and *Dental*.
- *Mental health* and *Alcohol and drug* services delivered 3.0 million services.
- *Pharmacy, Pathology, Radiology & organ imaging* made up a further 17.1 million services.
- 5.4 million occasions were for *Community health, Outreach* or *District nursing* services.

The proportion of non-admitted patient occasions of service which are related to outpatient care varies across states, from 39% in the Northern Territory to 68% in the Australian Capital Territory. For all states except Western Australia, the largest contributor to outpatient-related services was *Other medical/surgical/obstetric* followed by *Allied health*, whereas in Western Australia the order was reversed. There was also considerable variation in activity for other non-admitted patient service types across states and territories. For example,

Pharmacy, Pathology, Radiology and organ imaging accounted for 67% of all non-admitted patient occasions of service in New South Wales, but only 28% of all non-admitted patient occasions of service in South Australia.

Table 6.2: Number of individual occasions of service ('000)^(a) for outpatient and other non-admitted patient services, public acute hospitals, states and territories, 2008–09

Type of service	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT ^(b)	Total ^(c)
Occasions of service ('000)									
Outpatient care									
Allied health	761	1,047	632	1,008	180	86	26	10	3,752
Dental	497	256	..	12	9	2	..	..	775
Dialysis	26	..	<1	..	..	..	..	..	26
Endoscopy and related procedures	18	..	13	..	22	2	2	..	58
Other medical/surgical/obstetric ^(d)	5,248	1,637	2,545	755	919	364	315	122	11,906
<i>Total outpatient occasions of service</i>	6,550	2,940	3,190	1,775	1,131	455	343	132	16,516
Pharmacy ^(e) , Pathology, Radiology and organ imaging	7,713	1,806	5,429	1,114	230	451	119	204	17,066
Mental health, Alcohol & drug	2,079	707	168	65	19	2	2	..	3,042
Community health, Outreach and District nursing ^(f)	3,345	569	426	790	196	<1	38	..	5,365
Total non-admitted patient occasions of service	19,687	6,021	9,214	3,745	1,576	909	502	336	41,989

Notes: See Boxes 6.1 and 6.2 for notes on data limitations and methods.

- (a) Reporting arrangements have varied significantly across years and across jurisdictions.
- (b) *Radiology* figures for the Northern Territory are underestimated and *Pathology* figures relate only to three of the five hospitals.
- (c) National total includes only those states and territories for which data are available.
- (d) *Other medical/surgical/obstetric* includes the outpatient services of *Gynaecology, Obstetrics, Cardiology, Endocrinology, Oncology, Respiratory, Gastroenterology, Medical, General practice primary care, Paediatric, Plastic surgery, Urology, Orthopaedic surgery, Ophthalmology, Ear, nose and throat, Chemotherapy, Paediatric surgery* and *Renal medical*.
- (e) Justice Health in New South Wales reported a large number of occasions of service for *Pharmacy* which may not be typical for other hospitals.
- (f) Justice Health in New South Wales reported a large number of occasions of service which may not be typical of *District nursing*.

Source: National Public Hospital Establishments Database.

Additional information for states and territories is available in Table S6.2 at the end of this chapter.

In 2008–09, almost 341,000 non-admitted patient care occasions of service were reported to the NPHEd for group sessions (provided to more than one patient at a time), with *Mental health, Alcohol & drug* and *Community health* accounting for 31% of the sessions (see Table S6.2).

What care was provided?

Clinic-level data were provided to the NOCD for 13.0 million occasions of service for individuals and 144,000 group sessions for non-admitted patient outpatient clinic care. The estimated proportion of outpatient-related occasions of service for all hospitals that also reported to the NOCD was about 77% for individual occasions of service, and about 62% for group sessions (see Table S6.2). Clinic-level data were provided for 84 *Principal referral and Specialist women's and children's hospitals*, 38 *Large hospitals* and 15 *Other hospitals* (not classified in peer groups A or B). Coverage varied significantly by state and territory, ranging from 65% for the Australian Capital Territory to 100% for Tasmania for individual

occasions of service and from 35% for Victoria to 100% for Western Australia for group occasions of service.

In 2008–09, just over half of individual outpatient occasions of service reported to the NOCD were provided by *Allied Health, Medical* and *Obstetrics* clinics (Table 6.3).

Table 6.3: Outpatient care individual occasions of service^(a), by outpatient clinic-type, states and territories, 2008–09

Clinic type	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
Allied health	622,938	772,541	511,655	465,856	173,051	81,231	24,887	8,508	2,660,667
Dental	224,623	128,661	0	3,580	9,453	1,684	0	0	368,001
Gynaecology	54,059	45,745	66,916	21,273	36,807	10,638	4,835	6,018	246,291
Obstetrics	850,179	310,242	372,770	98,782	117,256	49,920	46,342	18,966	1,864,457
Cardiology	74,933	21,802	87,550	29,920	24,820	21,011	12,303	1,744	274,083
Endocrinology	175,999	56,181	67,921	31,267	30,982	23,320	10,638	1,287	397,595
Oncology	323,111	157,262	87,859	48,196	19,126	47,730	16,392	2,092	701,768
Respiratory	159,328	16,280	61,158	15,577	32,785	4,956	5,203	1,114	296,401
Gastroenterology	31,921	22,454	34,926	13,473	17,542	1,458	5,557	160	127,491
Medical	1,141,110	207,243	312,517	225,480	116,531	63,830	31,590	19,324	2,117,625
General practice/primary care	247,482	0	21,789	574	0	0	0	0	269,845
Paediatric	112,845	13,972	46,141	8,511	29,600	19,732	6,657	5,406	242,864
Endoscopy	17,553	0	12,520	4	15,481	2,307	2,244	837	50,946
Plastic surgery	33,397	90,757	29,320	37,714	25,983	3,794	5,866	1,557	228,388
Urology	29,608	42,137	42,736	16,981	13,757	1,748	1,177	375	148,519
Orthopaedic	279,111	175,392	262,671	79,629	58,877	18,490	12,629	12,547	899,346
Ophthalmology	150,876	98,724	72,519	52,757	59,986	8,479	7,074	13,505	463,920
Ear, nose and throat surgery	30,618	44,368	47,792	24,099	20,131	908	2,192	4,172	174,280
Pre-admission and pre-anaesthesia	192,680	96,949	148,938	26,128	41,585	17,942	7,673	7,030	538,925
Chemotherapy	78,371	0	4,688	454	20,918	18,663	5,187	1,924	130,205
Dialysis	25,145	0	33	1,024	0	0	0	3,374	29,576
Surgery	93,786	139,286	142,447	44,487	78,133	48,139	8,489	14,809	569,576
Paediatric surgery	10,018	9,968	8,255	311	3,389	0	1,239	427	33,607
Renal medicine	116,816	0	50,458	0	17,941	10,552	5,839	0	201,606
Total	5,076,507	2,449,964	2,493,579	1,246,077	964,134	456,532	224,013	125,176	13,035,982

Notes: See Boxes 6.1 and 6.2 for notes on data limitations and methods.

(a) There were variations among jurisdictions in the reporting of occasions of service because of differences in admission practices and in the types of facilities offering these services.

Source: National Outpatient Care Database.

In 2008–09, over 71% of group sessions reported to the NOCD were provided by *Allied Health* clinics (Table 6.4).

Table 6.4: Outpatient care group occasions of service^(a), by outpatient clinic-type, states and territories, 2008–09

Clinic type	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
Allied health	15,918	9,498	5,403	65,601	5,264	631	187	0	102,502
Dental	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gynaecology	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15
Obstetrics	3,673	0	1,771	0	1,318	265	37	0	7,064
Cardiology	2,246	0	916	0	332	42	0	0	3,536
Endocrinology	1,335	0	425	0	155	216	71	0	2,202
Oncology	480	0	52	4	0	0	0	0	536
Respiratory	2,123	0	4	0	138	0	0	0	2,265
Gastroenterology	141	0	67	0	69	0	0	0	277
Medical	17,321	0	480	471	3,443	112	6	125	21,958
General practice/primary care	319	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	330
Paediatric	417	0	0	0	503	0	0	0	920
Endoscopy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Plastic surgery	6	0	0	0	590	0	0	0	596
Urology	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13
Orthopaedic	402	0	1	0	12	0	0	0	415
Ophthalmology	0	0	0	0	0	14	0	0	14
Ear, nose and throat surgery	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Pre-admission and pre-anaesthesia	239	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	241
Chemotherapy	195	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	195
Dialysis	109	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	109
Surgery	170	0	0	0	96	0	2	0	268
Paediatric surgery	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Renal medicine	621	0	0	0	19	0	0	0	640
Total	45,748	9,498	9,119	66,087	11,941	1,280	303	125	144,101

Notes: See Boxes 6.1 and 6.2 for notes on data limitations and methods.

(a) There were variations among jurisdictions in the reporting of occasions of service because of differences in admission practices and in the types of facilities offering these services.

Source: National Outpatient Care Database.

Additional information

Further detailed information on non-admitted patient care by state or territory of hospitalisation and public hospital peer groups is available in the following supplementary tables and in the tables accompanying this report on the CD and Internet.

Supplementary tables

The following supplementary tables provide more detailed information on non-admitted patient care by state and territory.

Box 6.3 Methods – Chapter 6 Supplementary tables

Table S6.2

- (a) Reporting arrangements have varied significantly across years and across jurisdictions.
- (b) *Radiology* figures for the Northern Territory are underestimated and *Pathology* figures relate only to three of the five hospitals.
- (c) National total includes only those states and territories for which data are available.
- (d) *Other medical/surgical/obstetric* includes the outpatient services of *Gynaecology, Obstetrics, Cardiology, Endocrinology, Oncology, Respiratory, Gastroenterology, Medical, General practice primary care, Paediatric, Plastic surgery, Urology, Orthopaedic surgery, Ophthalmology, Ear, nose and throat, Chemotherapy, Paediatric surgery* and *Renal medical*.
- (e) Justice Health in New South Wales reported a large number of occasions of service for *Pharmacy* which may not be typical for other hospitals.
- (f) Justice Health in New South Wales reported a large number of occasions of service which may not be typical of *District nursing*.
- (g) Includes any group sessions for *Dialysis and Endoscopy* and related procedures.

Source: National Public Hospital Establishments Database.

Table S6.1: Outpatient occasions of service, by public hospital peer group, states and territories, 2008–09

Peer group	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
Principal referral and Specialist women's and children's hospitals									
Hospitals reporting outpatient occasions of service									
Individual occasions of service	29	20	19	5	5	2	2	2	84
Group occasions of service	28	12	15	5	5	2	2	1	70
Occasions of service reported									
Individual occasions of service	4,358,002	1,920,799	2,318,789	909,311	831,676	367,021	224,013	125,176	11,054,787
Group occasions of service	35,609	6,003	8,486	47,319	10,181	505	303	125	108,531
Large hospitals									
Hospitals reporting outpatient occasions of service									
Individual occasions of service	13	14	4	4	2	1	0	0	38
Group occasions of service	13	9	4	4	2	1	0	0	33
Occasions of service reported									
Individual occasions of service	654,050	498,695	174,790	96,504	120,895	54,582	..N22	..	1,599,516
Group occasions of service	9,232	3,347	633	5,461	1,612	775	..	..	21,060
Total									
Hospitals reporting outpatient occasions of service									
Individual occasions of service	44	35	23	19	8	4	2	2	137
Group occasions of service	43	22	19	15	8	3	2	1	113
Occasions of service reported									
Individual occasions of service	5,076,507	2,449,964	2,493,579	1,246,077	964,134	456,532	224,013	125,176	13,035,982
Group occasions of service	45,748	9,498	9,119	66,087	11,941	1,280	303	125	144,101
Estimated proportion of occasions of service in NOCD ^(a)									
Individual occasions of service	78	83	78	70	85	100	65	95	79
Group occasions of service	62	35	71	100	89	36	17	100	63

Notes: See Boxes 6.1 and 6.2 for notes on data limitations and methods.

(a) The number of outpatient occasions of service reported to the NOCD divided by the number of outpatient-related occasions of service reported to the NPHEd as a percentage.

Table S6.2 Non-admitted patient care occasions of service^(a), public acute hospitals, states and territories, 2008–09

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT ^(b)	Total ^(c)
Individual occasions of service									
Outpatient care									
Allied health	761,182	1,046,751	632,023	1,008,440	180,494	86,331	26,445	9,894	3,751,560
Dental	496,582	255,763	..	11,900	9,453	1,684	..	..	775,382
Dialysis	25,579	..	33	..	..	..	..	..	25,612
Endoscopy and related procedures	18,393	..	12,801	..	22,140	2,307	2,244	..	57,885
Other medical/surgical/obstetric ^(d)	5,247,780	1,637,315	2,545,260	755,022	918,912	364,484	314,694	122,099	11,905,566
<i>Total outpatient occasions of service</i>	<i>6,549,516</i>	<i>2,939,829</i>	<i>3,190,117</i>	<i>1,775,362</i>	<i>1,130,999</i>	<i>454,806</i>	<i>343,383</i>	<i>131,993</i>	<i>16,516,005</i>
Mental health	751,967	681,663	92,627	65,250	18,585	2,108	1,887	..	1,614,087
Alcohol and drug	1,326,799	25,382	75,767	0	..	0	..	..	1,427,948
Pharmacy ^(e)	3,581,070	460,891	610,939	197,449	..	115,662	1,371	38,200	5,005,582
Community health	1,548,685	337,769	167,088	513,480	7,127	624	17,303	..	2,592,076
District nursing ^(f)	1,486,123	226,695	118,318	163,591	6,804	0	..	..	2,001,531
Pathology	3,235,058	720,461	3,836,489	467,707	..	246,531	36,977	98,030	8,641,253
Radiology and organ imaging	896,894	624,310	981,946	448,824	229,755	88,833	80,466	67,764	3,418,792
Other outreach	310,521	4,308	140,314	113,177	182,498	91	20,937	..	771,846
Total individual occasions of service	19,686,633	6,021,308	9,213,605	3,744,840	1,575,768	908,655	502,324	335,987	41,989,120
Group sessions									
Outpatient care									
Allied health	20,033	23,920	7,645	13,972	6,089	2,898	501	..	75,058
Dental	15	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	15
Other medical/surgical/obstetric ^(d)	53,279	3,202	5,127	..	7,309	621	1,239	125	70,902
<i>Total outpatient occasions of service^(g)</i>	<i>73,436</i>	<i>27,122</i>	<i>12,772</i>	<i>13,972</i>	<i>13,398</i>	<i>3,519</i>	<i>1,740</i>	<i>125</i>	<i>146,084</i>
Mental health	25,514	..	..	4,149	361	..	..	..	30,024
Alcohol and drug	1,455	..	88	n.a.	..	..	..	..	1,543
Community health	39,751	..	4,232	30,418	..	..	131	..	74,532
District nursing	5,205	..	100	3,399	..	..	..	..	8,704
Other outreach	5,259	..	321	4,201	69,991	..	79	..	79,851
Other	258	n.a.	0	2	..	n.a.	..	n.a.	260
Total group sessions	150,769	27,122	17,513	56,141	83,750	3,519	1,950	125	340,889

Notes: See Boxes 6.1 and 6.2 for notes on data limitations and methods. See Box 6.3 for footnotes specific to this table.