

Media Release

All Western Australians urged: Think about visiting a GP before going to emergency

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In the lead up to Christmas and summer holidays, Western Australians are being urged to plan ahead and build a relationship with a GP, rather than heading to emergency departments to address non-urgent, minor ailments.

At the launch today of its “*Choose Well, When You’re Worried Sick*” campaign, WA Primary Health Alliance (WAPHA) Chair, Dr Richard Choong said that knowing about your health care options in advance of being sick or injured is extremely important for individuals and the entire health system.

“For some critical things, your local emergency department is irreplaceable. However, your GP knows far more about you, your family and your medical history, so when it’s not that urgent, they can give you the best medical advice and treatment.

“However, over 200,000 people are visiting Western Australian emergency departments every year with ailments that could be seen by a GP*.

“At a cost of at least \$600 per visit, that means a \$120 million bill for taxpayers,” Dr Choong said.

WAPHA operates the state’s three Australian Government funded Primary Health Networks and has organised the campaign to inform the community that a GP is often the best health care option and a viable alternative to emergency care, even during the holiday period.

With Christmas being a peak time in emergency departments, WAPHA wants to help ensure that highly skilled emergency teams can focus on doing what they do best.

Federal Minister for Aged Care; Indigenous Health and Member for Hasluck, Ken Wyatt, said all medical treatment starts with a decision on who to speak to first, so “*Choose Well, When You’re Worried Sick*” deliberately encourages people to think about their GP.

“We are also urging people to take the time before they get sick to find a GP close to their home or work and to start building a relationship with them, particularly if they are new to WA, have changed suburbs or moved out of home recently.

“Regularly visiting the same GP means there is a comprehensive medical history that will help that GP and their colleagues in the same general practice pick up things early, or before they become a problem.

“This campaign is a great example of how federal and state health systems can work together to ensure primary care is used most appropriately, so that emergency departments can focus on treating emergencies,” Minister Wyatt said.

People are reminded that attention should still be sought at an emergency department for:

- Chest pain
- Severe headaches they’ve never had before
- Trouble with speech or movement
- A very sick child
- Serious accident or illness

In all these instances choosing the emergency department will help save lives and result in timely, highly skilled emergency care. All other ailments and injuries can be treated by a GP.

Local GP, Dr Sri Srigandan, said he often loses contact with his patients once they’ve left the family home.

“Even healthy 18 to 35 year olds should stay connected to a regular GP. This relationship will ensure they’re always up-to-date with screening tests and vaccinations, as well as able to talk about issues like lifestyle and mental health,” he said.

The “*Choose Well, When You’re Worried Sick*” campaign will run from November to February. For more information about how to choose whether to go to an emergency department or a GP, people can visit myhealthcareoptions.com.au

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About WAHPA: WAPHA oversees the strategic commissioning functions of the Perth North, Perth South and Country WA Primary Health Networks (PHNs). The WA PHNs are three of 31 PHNs established by the Australian Government nationally to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of medical services for the community. We work across the WA healthcare system with doctors, allied health professionals, Area Health Services and service providers to improve the coordination of care for people who are at risk of poor health outcomes. For more information, visit www.wapha.org.au