

Elective surgery restart vindicates anti-COVID strategy

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The staged return of some elective surgery next week announced today by the Prime Minister is not only great news for many patients on waiting lists but also a vindication of the cautious measures that have kept COVID-19 at bay, the Consumers Health Forum said today.

“Now that the COVID surge anticipated in early planning hasn’t transpired, we support the resumption of elective surgery on a staged basis starting with those at greatest risk of a worse or emergency outcome if surgery did not proceed,” Leanne Wells, the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, said.

“A vigilant response to control the spread of COVID in the Australian community has always been essential but continued access to health care for non-COVID related medical conditions is also important”.

“The return of elective surgery to around 25% of activity in private and public hospitals for those needing procedures like post-cancer recovery, joint replacements, cataract treatment, IVF and dental treatment will come as great relief for many patients whose quality of life and sense of wellbeing will be greatly improved as a result”.

“For the wider community, it is a signal that we can take great confidence in Australia’s COVID response and the judicious planning and advice of the health officials advising National Cabinet.

“The proviso must be that this be done safely for both patient and clinician and without lessening the system’s capacity to respond to any increase in active COVID patients needing hospitalisation in the public system and/or as public patients under the recent agreement with private hospitals to take COVID ‘overflow’.

“To falter here would create a different set of problems for our system as we have previously warned.

“We should, however, restart elective surgery with caution. Australians remain anxious and will want to see us continue a strong and planned response to managing the COVID crisis.

“Key caveats are that:

- resumption occurs in an environment where the public can be assured and have confidence that the necessary personal protection equipment is available system -wide including in general practice.
- the risk to health professionals is minimised
- resumption can be ‘switched off’ in the event of any change in the COVID situation.

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“We likewise support resumption of IVF services. Disruption to these, while necessary in the early stages of COVID planning, risked grave impacts on people’s lives and their psychological health and wellbeing,” Ms Wells said.

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