



**AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION
(SOUTH AUSTRALIA) INC.**

ABN 91 028 693 268

20 August 2021

Hon Stephen Wade MLC
Minister for Health and Wellbeing
Government of South Australia
E: ministerforhealth@sa.gov.au

Dear Minister

Re: Mental health bed numbers in South Australia

Thank you for your email of 3 August 2021 and the opportunity to clarify the concerns of the Australian Medical Association in South Australia (AMA(SA)) about the number of mental health beds in South Australia. In your letter, you referred to media comments from me, as President of AMA(SA), in which I called for an increase in mental health beds and outlined this state's status in comparison to the national average of mental health bed numbers.

As I am sure you will agree, we may have different sources for determining bed numbers, and those numbers may relate to different factors or be interpreted in different ways. In comments published in *The Advertiser*, I noted that South Australia's acute psychiatric bed number was 20 per cent below the national average. In your letter, you advise that the most recent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) reports indicate that the overall number of acute psychiatric beds in South Australia is 22.6 beds per 100,000 people, compared with the national average of 20.7 beds per 100,000 people.

My information agrees with yours, in that this comparison indicates we are close to the national average for acute beds in South Australia. However, the South Australian figure of 22.6 beds per 100,000 people in South Australia includes the 24 beds that are specifically for veterans, a provision that in other states is usually provided privately, and therefore not included in the 'beds per 100,000 people' ratio. I perhaps should have been clearer that the desperately needed mental health beds are in the non-acute and private sectors, both of which support acute beds and so contribute to the considerable bed block within the mental health system – the bed block that directly affects the devastating waiting times for mental health patients in emergency departments. This is the area in which an increase in bed numbers is so urgently needed in South Australia. The quoted 136 inpatient beds (provided by the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, the peak body for psychiatry in South Australia) relates to these non-acute and private sector beds.

AMA(SA) appreciates the attention you have given this issue. However, there is no doubt that the crisis in mental health and its role in ongoing ramping and ED overcrowding are not improving. We would welcome the opportunity to work with you, alongside the RANZCP and other interested parties, to improve the services available to mental health patients, most specifically increasing beds within the sub-acute and private sectors.

Should you wish to discuss the issues raised in this letter, please contact me via EA Mrs Claudia Baccanello on 8361 0109 or at claudia@amasa.org.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michelle Atchison'.

Dr Michelle Atchison
President

[3049-Mental health beds-response to Minister_200821](#)

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