



# healthy territory

A Newsletter for people in ACT health care

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## New Chief Executive for ACT Health

ACT Health's  
new  
CE Dr Tony  
Sherbon



**D**r Tony Sherbon joined ACT Health as its new Chief Executive early in June. He comes to Canberra from the position of Chief Executive of the Illawarra Area Health Service (IAHS), a role he took up in March 2000.

Dr Sherbon has a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery from the University of NSW and a Masters in Business Administration from the University of Technology, Sydney. He is also a fellow of the Royal Australian College of Medical Administrators and the Australian College of Health Service Executives.

Prior to his time at IAHS Dr Sherbon had 15 years experience in clinical and administrative management within the NSW Health system, including three years as Chief Executive Officer of Northern Rivers Area Health Service. He has also held clinical and management positions at a number of major Sydney teaching hospitals.

While at IAHS Dr Sherbon made a significant contribution to the Illawarra community, steering the organisation through a period of dynamic change that focused on improving patient care and access to clinical expertise.

As CEO, Dr Sherbon was responsible for the strategic and operational management of IAHS, which provides services for 350,000 people. This responsibility also included stewardship of the region's nine hospitals, a comprehensive range of community-based services, population health services and a series of partnerships with a wide range of non-government organisations.

He made a significant contribution to improving several services throughout the Illawarra health system, including the establishment and development of the Illawarra Stroke Unit, the Gynaecological Oncology Service and the Interventional Cardiology Unit.

Dr Sherbon was committed to raising the calibre of specialist staff through enhancements to teaching and research, particularly through the establishment of the Illawarra Shoalhaven Medical Teaching Program and a partnership with the University of Wollongong to employ a conjoint Director of Research.

Nursing vacancies halved during Dr Sherbon's three years as CEO, and recruitment processes for speciality areas of nursing improved significantly. He also played an important role in reducing surgical waiting lists.

He has several priorities in his new role as ACT Health CE, chief of which is reducing the number of Canberra cancer patients who are forced to travel to NSW for treatment.

Dr Sherbon is also committed to improving the ACT's mental health services, indigenous health and to cutting elective surgery waiting times.

He has been appointed to ACT Health for five years.

# ACT Health welcomes new TCH General Manager

ACT Health CE Dr Tony Sherbon, has welcomed Mr John Mollett's appointment as General Manager of The Canberra Hospital, saying his proven track record in health administration made him a perfect candidate for the position.

John is currently the Chief of Operations for the Waikato District Health Board in New Zealand. He was previously General Manager of Waikato Hospital and has also managed health services in Victoria.

John will commence duties in late August. Until that time, Dr Bill Adam will continue to act as General Manager.

"John has done a fantastic job at Waikato and I welcome his appointment to The Canberra Hospital," Dr Sherbon said.

"I am confident he will take The Canberra Hospital forward and cement its place as the region's premier health facility.

"Since the departure of Ted Rayment, The Canberra Hospital has been fortunate to have Dr Wayne Ramsey and now Dr Bill Adam in charge.

"Wayne has done an excellent job during what has been a demanding time for the hospital and I thank him for his support and dedication," said Dr Sherbon.

## IVF birth numbers



## higher than ever

*More Australian babies are being born as a result of IVF technology*

More babies than ever are the result of IVF treatment, according to the latest report on assisted conception released recently by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's National Perinatal Statistics Unit (NPSU) and the Fertility Society of Australia.

In 2000, 4,801 babies were born in Australia after IVF, accounting for 1.9% of all births. In 1992 there were 2,237 births as the result of IVF treatment, accounting for 0.9% of all births.

*Assisted Conception Australia and New Zealand 2000 and 2001* also shows that viable pregnancy rates have doubled from what they were a decade ago, with the chance of pregnancy from each IVF treatment cycle at around 21% in 2001.

The average age of all women who gave birth after assisted conception treatment was 33.6 years - more than four and a half years older than the average age of Australian mothers in 2000.

NPSU Clinical Advisor in Women's Health, Professor Michael Chapman, said that the proportion of women over 40 years of age having treatment had increased.

"However their pregnancy rates are significantly less than those achieved by younger women," Professor Chapman said.

"So, even though our report shows that assisted reproductive technology continues to improve, women still need to consider the trade-off between risks and benefits when delaying childbearing.

"It's also worth noting that caesarean rates for assisted conception pregnancies were around double the rate for all Australian mothers in 2000."

Professor Chapman said the improvements in pregnancy rates from IVF treatment were mainly due to advances in laboratory techniques and management of treatment cycles.

"This has been achieved while transferring fewer embryos in each treatment cycle, which has reduced the incidence of triplets and quadruplets. Twin pregnancy rates, however, remain high for IVF births," said Professor Chapman.

[www.aihw.gov.au/publications](http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications)

# ACT Health staff recognised for exceptional efforts

Seven staff from ACT Health were recently recognised for their exceptional commitment to service in the 2003 Commissioner for Public Administration Awards.

ACT Public Service Commissioner Richard Moss presented the awards in his last public function before retiring, and said he was “struck by the quality and diversity of achievement by ACT public servants”.

Mr Moss said the awards played an important part in promoting high performance in the public service and the 2003 recipients represented high quality service and the ideals of the public service. The Commissioner added that the awards ceremony was due recognition for some quiet achievers.

Congratulations to the following ACT Health recipients:

**Rhys Ollerenshaw**, Policy and Planning Division, for his model commitment and high standard of work in complex projects;

**Fiona Baillie**, Calvary Health Care, for her exceptional coordination of counselling services after the Canberra bushfire disaster in January;

**Riemke Kampen**, Calvary Health Care, for her important contributions to national policy, standards and guidelines for infection control and clinical indicators;

**Linette Bone**, Mental Health ACT, for her inspirational efforts to improve mental health service delivery and challenging the stigma associated with mental illness;

**Jo Mazengarb**, ACT Community Care, for her outstanding eight-year commitment to the area of alcohol and drug abuse;

**Isobel Harvey**, The Canberra Hospital, for her commitment to leadership, knowledge-based practice, and the highest clinical standards in her senior nursing roles; and

**Margo Goodin**, Population Health, for her major contribution to national tobacco control and other public health matters.



*ACT Health staff show off their certificates at the 2003 Commissioner for Public Administration Awards*

# Quality First Awards

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The Minister for Health, Mr Simon Corbell MLA has presented posters to the finalists and winners of the Inaugural Quality First Awards and re-launched the Awards for 2003.

The Quality First Awards were launched by the Chief Minister in May 2002 and aim to recognise leadership and reward innovation in patient safety and quality of care within the ACT health care system.

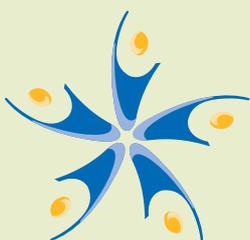
The awards provide an opportunity for health care professionals to share ideas, information, resources and expertise. The awards are open to all people working in ACT public health care who have increased standards of patient care through quality improvement.

In 2002 a total of 28 nominations were received from across the public health system, and 13 projects were selected as finalists.

All ACT health professionals are urged to consider entering their completed projects in the 2003 Quality First Awards.

#### Entries Close 11 August 2003

Application forms are available at [www.health.gov.au/qualityfirstawards](http://www.health.gov.au/qualityfirstawards) or contact your CHIP manager, the Clinical Quality Unit on 620 51561 or email: [qualityfirstawards@act.gov.au](mailto:qualityfirstawards@act.gov.au)



**Quality First Awards**  
Recognising Quality and Safety in Health Care in the ACT

## Upcoming Conferences

### Health Outcomes 2003: The Quest for Practice Improvement

**Ninth Annual National Conference on Health Outcomes, 20 - 21 August, Rydges Lakeside, Canberra**

Conference sessions this year will examine a range of areas of health outcomes evaluation, including measurement methodologies and related issues, outcomes in clinical practice, service improvement frameworks in National Health Priority Areas, population health based approaches, hospital quality, Indigenous health, economic modelling, data set development and many other areas of research and practice. One 'stream' of sessions will look at mental health outcomes issues, including a major report back from the implementation of consumer outcome measurement in *all* specialist mental health services under the Australian and New Zealand National Mental Health Strategies. The Mental Health Outcomes stream will also contain reports from independent initiatives such as the Schizophrenia Care Assessment Program.

**Email:** [lorna.tilley@act.gov.au](mailto:lorna.tilley@act.gov.au)

**web:** [www.vow.edu/commerce/ahoc](http://www.vow.edu/commerce/ahoc)

### Third Indigenous Health Convention and Fifth National Men's Health Conference

**Cairns, QLD, 8 - 12 September 2003**

The Third National Indigenous Male Health Convention will be held on 8-9 September. The convention gives Indigenous men the opportunity to address the unique cultural and social context of their health and to build on integrating traditional ways with contemporary best practice.

The Fifth National Men's and Boy's Health Conference is running from 10-12 September, with a bridging day (10<sup>th</sup>) linking both conferences. Both conferences will build on the themes of earlier conferences and will promote positive aspects of the health and wellbeing of men and boys.

**[www.regocentre.com/mhc/register](http://www.regocentre.com/mhc/register)**

conferences

# Whooping cough numbers on the rise

ACT parents are again being urged to keep up to date with their children's immunisation schedule as the number of cases of pertussis, or whooping cough, continues to rise.

Notifications received by ACT Health have risen significantly for the period January to June compared to the same period last year.

"Almost all of the cases are in high school aged students and we have been sending notes to all schools encouraging pertussis awareness and early detection," said ACT Deputy Chief Health Officer, Dr Charles Guest.

"One of the greatest risks with this disease is the high rate of infection. Most cases of whooping cough occur in school-aged children who in turn infect infant siblings – the group most at risk of serious complications of the disease. Antibiotic treatment given early in the illness can reduce this risk.

"By far the most effective way to avoid pertussis is to be fully immunised and parents should ensure that children have received their vaccinations at two, four, six and 18 months and at four years.

"We are also asking parents with older children to check their child's immunisation record and catch up on any missed doses," Dr Guest said.

Dr Guest urged parents to monitor their children for signs of persistent coughing over the coming weeks, to avoid contact with babies and young children if such a cough existed, and to seek medical advice if concerned.



**Parents are urged to check their children's immunisation status for whooping cough**

## From the editor

Welcome to the sixth edition of *Healthy Territory*, ACT Health's official record of what's going on in the ACT's busy health sector.

Contributions are gratefully accepted from anyone working within the health sector and we would like to hear from as wide a range of stakeholders as possible. *Healthy Territory* is for everyone working in ACT health settings so have your say and get your ideas, opinions, criticisms or suggestions in print.

**To enquire about contributing please contact the editor, Kath Denmead on 6205 2105 or by email to [kath.denmead@act.gov.au](mailto:kath.denmead@act.gov.au).**

# Calvary recognized

## for quality in physiotherapy services

In a boost for physiotherapy services in the ACT, the Calvary Public Hospital Physiotherapy Department has recently met the requirements for Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA) Accreditation.

Calvary has also been reaccredited as an APA Quality Endorsed Physiotherapy Service until June 2007.

"The APA Accreditation program has provided the physiotherapy profession in Australia with the opportunity to demonstrate world class standards in all aspects of physiotherapy services," said Calvary Chief Executive Officer, Robert Cusack.

"Calvary Physiotherapy Department initially gained quality accreditation in 1999, being one of only two hospitals at that time to achieve accreditation.

"We underwent a site review in 2002 and implemented further quality initiatives to enhance our practice and this has obviously paid off in gaining this new level of accreditation.

"Following Calvary's initiative, Community Care and The Canberra Hospital are currently progressing towards initial accreditation later this year," Mr Cusack said.

Mr Cusack said that having had quality accreditation for the past four years, Calvary Physiotherapy was leading the ACT in achieving and maintaining quality standards of physiotherapy practice, but he was pleased to see the other public agencies striving for the same level of excellence.

Contact for Director of Physiotherapy is Rebecca Parton on 6201 6194 or [rebecca.parton@calvary-act.com.au](mailto:rebecca.parton@calvary-act.com.au)

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## A psychosocial approach to treating cancer

A gap in the support available to ACT cancer patients has been filled after the recent launch of a new ACT Health program.

Talking at the launch, Health Minister Simon Corbell said that in addition to coping with the diagnosis and treatment of cancer, individuals and their immediate support group often had to face a range of practical, psychological and emotional issues.

"Each year approximately 1000 people in the ACT are diagnosed with cancer and as improvements are made to diagnosis and treatment options, the proportion of these people living and surviving cancer increases," Mr Corbell said.

"Many of them often find that their family and social functioning, as well as their work, employment and financial status can all be affected by their illness.

"The need to treat cancer holistically - not only through excellent medical

treatment, but also with psychosocial support - has been recognised as best practice by researchers, consumer groups, policy makers and health professionals," said Mr Corbell.

The new service - Community Care Cancer Support - employs a full time social worker and psychologist and hosts group information sessions that offer practical support and assistance with referral

It also aims to educate other health professionals and agencies about the psychosocial aspects of cancer and to establish partnerships with other service providers.

Community Care Cancer Support is not only for newly diagnosed cancer sufferers. People in remission, or facing a recurrence of their illness, will also be able to access sessions tailored to their needs.

Contact: Orlie Beer 6205 0941

# Minister announces new Aged Care Advisory Council

A new Aged Care Advisory Council has been formed to provide advice to the ACT Government on important health issues for Canberra's older community.

"In Canberra the population profile is younger than the national average, however forecasts indicate that the ageing of the population is a phenomenon that will gather pace and not reverse," said ACT Health Minister, Simon Corbell, on announcing the Council.

"An ageing population brings many benefits as older people make diverse and important contributions to our community. It also presents a range of challenges for those involved in planning and service delivery.

"The 2003-2004 ACT Budget recognises the ageing of Canberra's population and progresses priority areas for the aged community such as transport accessibility, community health services, sub-acute services, mental health and elder abuse," Mr Corbell said.

The Aged Care Advisory Council will actively seek the views of people using

aged care services and others involved in supporting older people. It will assist in the development of policies that provide appropriate health and community services for older Canberrans and their carers.

It will also establish links with the ACT Health Council, providing expertise and advice.

Membership of the Aged Care Advisory Council is as follows:

- Hilary Lang (Chair) – Council on the Ageing;
- Marion Reilly (Deputy Chair) – Health Care Consumers Association ACT;
- Dr Joan Buchanan – ACT Division of General Practice;
- Sheena Dadge – Home Help ACT;
- Paul Tso – ACT Chinese Australian Association;
- Ann Wentworth – Council on the Ageing; and
- Maelyn Wishart – Regular Defence Force Welfare Association.



*A new advisory council will identify health concerns for the aged*

## TCH part of worldwide diabetes trial

The Canberra Hospital is moving onto the world research stage with its participation in one of the largest ever international diabetes prevention trials.

The trial will investigate ways of preventing the onset of, or the progression to, Type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease in people who have a condition known as impaired glucose intolerance or IGT. IGT affects about one in eight Australians over the age of 40 and almost all of those affected are unaware of it.

Senior endocrinologist at the hospital, Professor Nikolai Petrovsky says participation in the trial will help doctors determine whether the development of Type 2 diabetes can be delayed, and complications associated with the disease reduced.

"We are studying people with IGT who are at high risk of progression to Type 2 diabetes. Once diabetes develops it is very difficult to control, so clearly the best strategy is prevention," Professor Petrovsky said.

"It is a great opportunity for The Canberra Hospital to be involved in an international trial of this scope and clearly demonstrates the high calibre of the researchers who work here."

Participants in the trial will be followed up for six years. They are required to visit their local study centre – in this case, TCH – several times in the first six months of the trial (which started in May) and then every six months thereafter.

"Type 2 diabetes imposes a huge burden on individuals and the community, with our current diabetes bill of \$3 billion expected to double if the disease is not contained soon," said Professor Petrovsky.

# Major new mental health project FOR ACT

**M**ental Health ACT is about to embark on a significant new project to develop a mental health strategy and action plan for the Territory.

The Mental Health Promotion Development Project will be conducted by Mental Health ACT over the next six months, in collaboration with the Australian Network for Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention for Mental Health (Auseinet). Auseinet has provided \$45,000 to the project.

There is increasing recognition of the value and cost effectiveness of measures which promote good mental health for the whole population, and programs that get in early to address the needs of 'at risk' groups before problems start.

This major project will map existing mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention activity across all sectors in the ACT and examine existing literature and reviews.

It also plans to identify the areas of most value and any pockets of need or service overlap.

One of the key activities of the project will be the development of an inter-sectoral strategy and action plan for mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention in the ACT which will tie in to the ACT Mental Health Strategy.

This strategy will guide activity in this crucial area over the next five years.

## ACT Bone Bank opens to accept deposits



*Bone Bank  
Coordinator  
Jennifer Bryant and  
Health Minister  
Simon Corbell at  
the opening*

**T**he Canberra Hospital will soon be able to meet its own demand for bone grafting following the launch recently of the ACT Bone Bank.

The ACT Bone Bank has been established to meet the need for bone grafting – a procedure similar to a blood transfusion – in the ACT and the surrounding region.

Previously the hospital had to purchase bone from other bone banks around Australia but will now be able to collect bone locally, making considerable financial savings. It will also be able to supply other hospitals with bone for use in operations.

Bone transplants, like organ transplants, have become highly refined and accepted routine surgical procedures. Orthopaedic surgeons use bone from a donor to help with structural deformities and to fill deficits in bones and joints in other people.

Patients receive a bone graft during surgery for a variety of reasons, including bone tumours, failed joint replacements, massive bone loss from trauma, spinal and sports injuries.

Prior to the establishment of the ACT Bone Bank, surgery involving a bone graft was an expensive procedure as the bone was sourced from interstate and required specialised transportation. The Canberra Hospital spent approximately \$150,000 on donor bone last year.

Using bone for transplantation has only recently become a medical reality. One of the many refinements in technique that has taken place over the past 20 years is the means to thoroughly test and sterilise the donated bone tissue before it is transplanted.

The process includes blood testing, looking for abnormalities or infectious diseases, more pathology testing during the surgery and sterilising of the bone.

The ACT Bone Bank has been licensed by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) under the Australian Code for Good Manufacturing Practice – Human Blood and Tissue.

# Government to **review** **smoking in** enclosed spaces

ACT Minister for Health, Simon Corbell, has released a discussion paper that will serve as the basis for public consultation on phasing-out smoking in ACT restaurants and licensed premises.

“In 1994, the ACT had the courage to enact landmark legislation that was considered daring for its time,” Mr Corbell said.

“We recognise, however, that since the original legislation was implemented, medical concerns, legal concerns, and community concerns about passive smoking have continued to grow.

“There is now unequivocal and indisputable evidence that passive smoking is harmful, and there is no safe exposure level. There is substantial community support for smoke-free environments, and the public rightly expects the Government to deliver high standard health protection for customers and employees in enclosed public places,” Mr Corbell said.

The Government recognised its obligation to protect people from foreseeable and preventable health risks and that smoking in enclosed places is now well

accepted as a public health issue.

It also noted that community norms and attitudes have changed, and there are many activities and substances that were once thought harmless, but which have proved to be dangerous to our health. Smoking and secondhand smoke fell into this category.

Mr Corbell said the discussion paper was not about stopping people from smoking, it was about ensuring people are not harmed by those who smoke in enclosed places.

“The current exemption system means that a double standard still exists where patrons and employees in a handful of restaurants and a significant number of pubs, clubs and bars are still exposed to health risks from environmental tobacco smoke. We therefore need to build on the experience and success of the original legislation and move towards more complete and equitable health protection for everyone.

“This is why we are proposing to phase out the current exemption system so that all enclosed public places are smoke-free and no patrons or employees have to risk their health from breathing other people’s smoke. The purpose of this discussion paper is to invite comment on how this



## ***A discussion paper will canvass options for a review of current smoking bans***

can be best achieved,” the Health Minister said.

Copies of the discussion paper - *Towards smoke-free enclosed public places in the ACT: Reforming the Smoke-free Areas [Enclosed Public Places] Act 1994* - have been sent to all premises with current exemptions, as well as health and industry groups and is available on the internet at [www.health.act.gov.au](http://www.health.act.gov.au)

The consultation process will include discussions with community and industry groups.

# Nurse Practitioner

provides enhanced choice and access



*Pioneers: The four participants from the Nurse Practitioner Trial, from left Elissa O'Keefe, Sharon Jordan, Lorna MacLellan and Robert Davis*

*(Photo by Peter Wells, courtesy of the Canberra Times)*

Nurse Practitioners will soon play a significant role in the Territory's health care after legislation establishing the role was presented recently to the ACT Legislative Assembly.

A successful Nurse Practitioner Trial run in several health settings around the ACT showed that Nurse Practitioners provide safe health care as well as offering alternative choices to consumers.

A nurse practitioner is a registered nurse who works within a multidisciplinary team. The role includes extended practice in the autonomous assessment and management of clients. Nurse Practitioners use nursing knowledge and skills gained through postgraduate education, and clinical experience in a specific area of nursing practice.

The role may include direct referral of patients to other health care professionals, prescribing from a designated list of medications, and ordering designated diagnostic investigations.

As well as endorsing this extended nursing role the *Nurses Amendment Bill 2003* will protect the title of Nurse Practitioner and allow the Nurses Board of the ACT to register Nurse Practitioners and accredit post-graduate Nurse Practitioner courses.

The legislation is also in line with international and national trends to establish Nurse Practitioners. Nurse Practitioner roles are being implemented in the public health sector in New South Wales and legislation changes have occurred in South Australia.

Further legislative changes will be introduced later this year to allow Nurse Practitioners to undertake the expanded scope of practice that was shown to be highly effective during the ACT Nurse Practitioner Trial.

Formal education of Nurse Practitioners in the ACT is due to commence later this year through a Masters Program at the University of Canberra. This course will be the first to utilise evidence-based research generated by the ACT Trial to determine the course content.

The success of the Nurse Practitioner Trial demonstrates that the ACT community supports diverse options in health care, and appreciates the improved service access and increased flexibility gained through different health care delivery models.

## SUPPORT SERVICE for Hep C sufferers



*Social worker and volunteer  
Jane Keany & EO of the  
ACT Hepatitis Council  
Carol Hart celebrate the  
launch of the service*

An alarming Hepatitis C infection rate in the ACT has prompted the establishment of Hepline, an ACT Government-funded support service for people living with Hepatitis C and their families and friends.

An estimated 2,500 people live with the virus in the ACT and there were 233 new notifications in 2002 alone, making this new service a vital resource for the community. Volunteers gave up their time to undergo training to form an essential part of the service.

The rates of Hepatitis C in the ACT and Australia-wide have risen exponentially since the disease was first identified in 1989. It is thought to have been present in Australia for over 20 years and there are about 210,000 people living with Hepatitis C nationally.

While some of these are new infections, most Hepatitis C notifications are from people who have been infected for years and have only recently been tested.

The number of people living with this virus will steadily rise over the coming years unless action is taken to educate the community about transmission, which is another compelling reason for establishing a service like Hepline.

The outcomes of Hepatitis C infection are not the same for all people and some will even clear the virus. Of those who develop Hepatitis C it is expected that 75% will develop chronic infection and five to 10% will develop cirrhosis after 20 years of infection.

The ACT Hepatitis C Council has commenced a major media campaign to raise awareness of Hepatitis C and reduce transmission.

HepLine can be contacted on  
**1300 301 383**

## Activity rises in Australian hospitals

Activity in Australia's hospitals, both public and private, rose in the last financial year according to *Australian Hospital Statistics 2001-02*, released last month by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

There were 6.4 million hospital admissions recorded in 2001-02, up 4.2% on the previous year. Overall patient-days (the total number of days spent in hospital by patients) rose by 3.4% to 23.2 million.

Most of the growth in hospital activity during the year occurred in the private sector, but the public sector showed rises too, after a decline the previous year.

Private hospital admissions increased by an estimated 9.5% to 2.4 million admissions, while public hospital admissions increased by 2.6% to 4.0 million.

The number of patient-days in private hospitals increased by 3.3% to almost 7.0 million, while for public hospitals the increase was 0.6% to 16.3 million patient-days.

The average length of stay in Australian hospitals continues to decline, and is now 3.6 days, down from 3.7 days in 2000-01. However, for patients who stayed at least one night, the average length of stay increased from 6.4 days in 2000-01 to 6.5 days in 2001-02.

Same day stays increased by 5.6% in public hospitals and by an estimated 11.8% in private hospitals.

Acting Head of the AIHW's Resources Division, Jenny Hargreaves, said that admissions and patient-days have continued to increase over the last decade.

"Between 1993-94 and 2001-02, admissions increased by almost 40% overall, with public hospital admissions going up by about 20%, and private hospital admissions by about 85%."

"Over the same period, the number of patient-days in public hospitals rose by just over 5%, while for private hospitals they increased markedly, by 36%," Ms Hargreaves said.

The average cost per stay in public hospitals in 2001-02 (adjusted for patient condition and case complexity) was \$3,017. Total public hospital expenditure in 2001-02 was estimated at \$16.8 billion, an increase of 5.0% in real terms on 2000-01 expenditure.

[www.aihw.gov.au/publications](http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications)



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# health first racks up 100 000 calls

Health First, the ACT's own 24-hour health information and referral service, has reached a significant milestone – recording 100,000 phone calls since its launch in February 2001.

The service's 100,000<sup>th</sup> caller was Michelle Whyard, who contacted Health First when her two-and-a-half year old daughter Alexandra experienced respiratory problems late at night.

Michelle's story is typical of those received by Health First, with research showing that women are the highest users of the telephone service, accounting for 53.7% of calls since the service began.

About 23% of calls concern children in the one to four years age bracket. Many calls also relate to adult chest and stomach pain.

Health First, an ACT Government initiative, employs a total of 29 people in Canberra, 22 of whom are employed as nurses.

The service is available to all Canberra residents and visitors by calling 6207 7777 or visiting [www.healthfirst.net.au](http://www.healthfirst.net.au)

*ABOVE: Michelle Whyard, centre, her daughter Alexandra and Health First's Robyn Corbin who took the milestone call*



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