

Update on Emergency Department Patient Flow and Bed Capacity Management

The Ministry of Health and the Bermuda Hospitals Board are providing an update on ongoing work to improve patient flow, reduce Emergency Department overcrowding, and strengthen Bermuda's acute and long-term care capacity. This update forms part of the shared commitment to keep the public informed as progress continues, particularly at King Edward VII Memorial Hospital, Bermuda's only emergency department.

BHB has set a clear operational target of six hours for Emergency Department (ED) boarding, which is the time between the decision to admit a patient and their transfer to an inpatient bed. This benchmark is consistent with the standard used by the US Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and is the primary measure of ED flow.

Hallway care, delayed discharges, and lost acute care bed days all affect how many inpatient beds are available. Because they are connected, these issues are managed together under the boarding target. Bermuda faces a special challenge: King Edward VII Memorial Hospital is the country's only emergency department, and there are no other local facilities where patients can be sent instead.

For admitted patients, time in the Emergency Department has two parts: the time it takes to reach a decision to admit, and the time spent boarding until an inpatient bed becomes available. As of May 2026, admitted patients waited a median of about five hours for a decision to admit, followed by a further median of about twenty hours boarding. This resulted in a typical total of roughly twenty-four hours in the ED before transferring to a ward. While this remains above the six hour target, boarding times have improved meaningfully over the past several months. Most patients who are not admitted continue to be treated and discharged within a median of under four hours.

A review of 29,512 ED encounters between April 2025 and March 2026 found that roughly 25 to 35 percent of patients, about 20 to 28 patients per day, could have potentially been treated in primary or community care settings. This work supports ongoing efforts to strengthen primary care access and reduce avoidable ED demand.

Since the introduction of the Bed Capacity Management Plan, BHB has seen measurable improvements. Median boarding time has dropped from around fifty hours earlier in 2026 to around twenty hours in May 2026, a reduction of about sixty percent. ED overcrowding has eased as a result, supported by enhanced discharge processes and the use of the new discharge lounge.

Performance still varies week to week, and boarding remains above target. The progress to date reflects the commitment of clinical teams and the coordinated approach between BHB and the Ministry of Health. To support long-term system sustainability, BHB will be adding thirty long-term care beds at MWI. This is part of the broader strategy to address the projected need for approximately 365 skilled nursing facility beds by 2035. In addition, a robust and expedited procurement process for the independent review of ED access is nearing completion.

Although an external reviewer has not yet been appointed, the process is actively progressing under the governance oversight of the Chairman of the Bermuda Hospitals Board. Updates will be provided at appropriate stages to ensure transparency while protecting the independence and integrity of the review.

As of 1 June 2026, forty-one patients who are medically fit for discharge were occupying acute care beds. Their median length of stay to date is about seventy-three days, with an average of about one hundred and eleven days. Seventeen patients with stays of ninety days or longer account for seventy-eight percent of all bed days used by this group. These patients are predominantly older adults, with a median age of seventy-four, and require skilled nursing or long-term care placement, which is the main reason for the delay. Work continues across the system to support timely and appropriate placement options.

The Minister of Health The Hon. Kim Wilson said: “The progress we are seeing is the result of strong collaboration between BHB and the Ministry, and I want to acknowledge the dedication of the teams who are working every day to improve patient flow and strengthen the system. While there is more work ahead, we are encouraged by the improvements already achieved and remain committed to supporting BHB as they continue this important work.”

The Acting CEO of BHB Ms. Judy Richardson added: “Our staff have been working extremely hard to improve the experience for patients and families, and the reduction in boarding times reflects that effort. We appreciate the Ministry’s ongoing support as we continue to implement the Bed Capacity Management Plan and expand long-term care capacity. We are committed to building on this progress and ensuring that patients receive timely, safe, and appropriate care.”

BHB, with the full support of the Ministry of Health, remains committed to reducing ED boarding times, improving patient flow, expanding long-term care capacity, strengthening primary and community care pathways, and maintaining transparency as this work continues.

-ENDS-