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Free doctor visit? Maybe not, as urgent clinic exceeds patient caps

By [Isabel Bird](#)
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Free doctor visit? Maybe not, as urgent clinic exceeds patient caps

Bulk-billing urgent care clinics are exceeding daily patient limits just months after opening to ease demand on hospital emergency services.

The issue arises as the North-West urgent care clinic is set to open in days.



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Federal and state funded urgent care clinics offer free GP medical care for patients with urgent but not life-threatening health concerns, with the aim to reduce pressure in emergency departments (ED).

The Launceston clinic is currently funded to see 40 patients a day over a six-hour period, from 2pm until 8pm, but exceeds that daily cap every day.

Extra funding required if Urgent Care Clinics to stay open for more patients

Australian Medical Association northern chairman Glenn Richardson said care clinic doctors in Launceston were now seeing an average of 55 to 60 patients a day.

He said the highest number the clinic had seen was 83.

"That is financially unviable and the numbers are going to have to be renegotiated if they want their urgent care clinics to stay open," Dr Richardson said.

"I know that in Hobart the urgent care clinic closes its doors when it hits 40 patients.

"The one in the North has not done that yet, but you can't continue to keep working and making a loss."

Meanwhile, latest state data [reveals a rise in the number of people accessing EDs](#) with non-urgent or potentially serious health concerns.

This was not surprising for Dr Richardson who said the care clinics could not make a real difference to ED pressures.

Dr Richardson said the main crisis contributing to ED demand was a GP shortage, further impacted by an ageing population and declining health literacy.

He added that the urgent care clinics are also only open for six hours.

"That is a big issue," he said.

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