

Prevalence of Access Block in Australia 2017-2020

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BACKGROUND

- ACEM has funded voluntary point prevalence surveys of access block in accredited Emergency Departments (EDs) at the start of June and September since 2007

OBJECTIVES

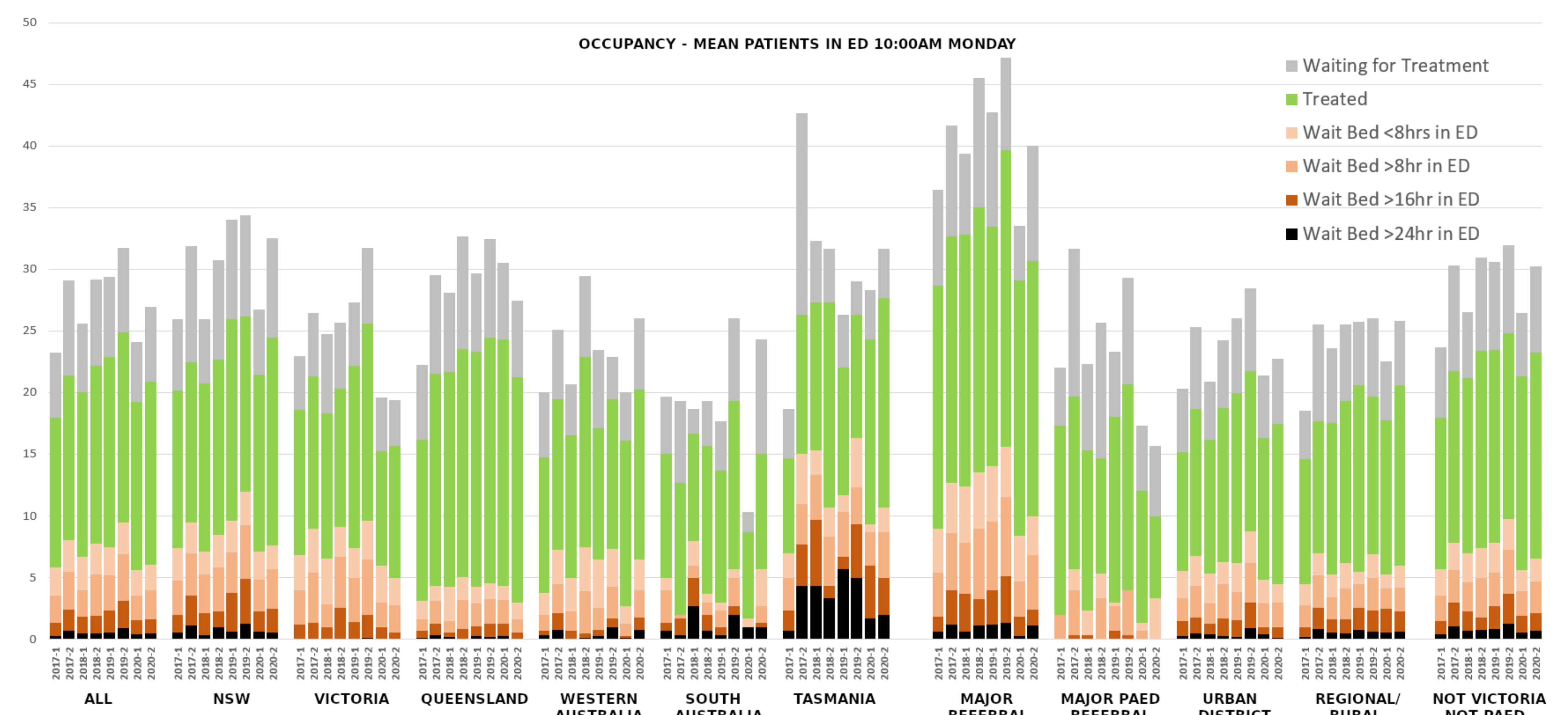
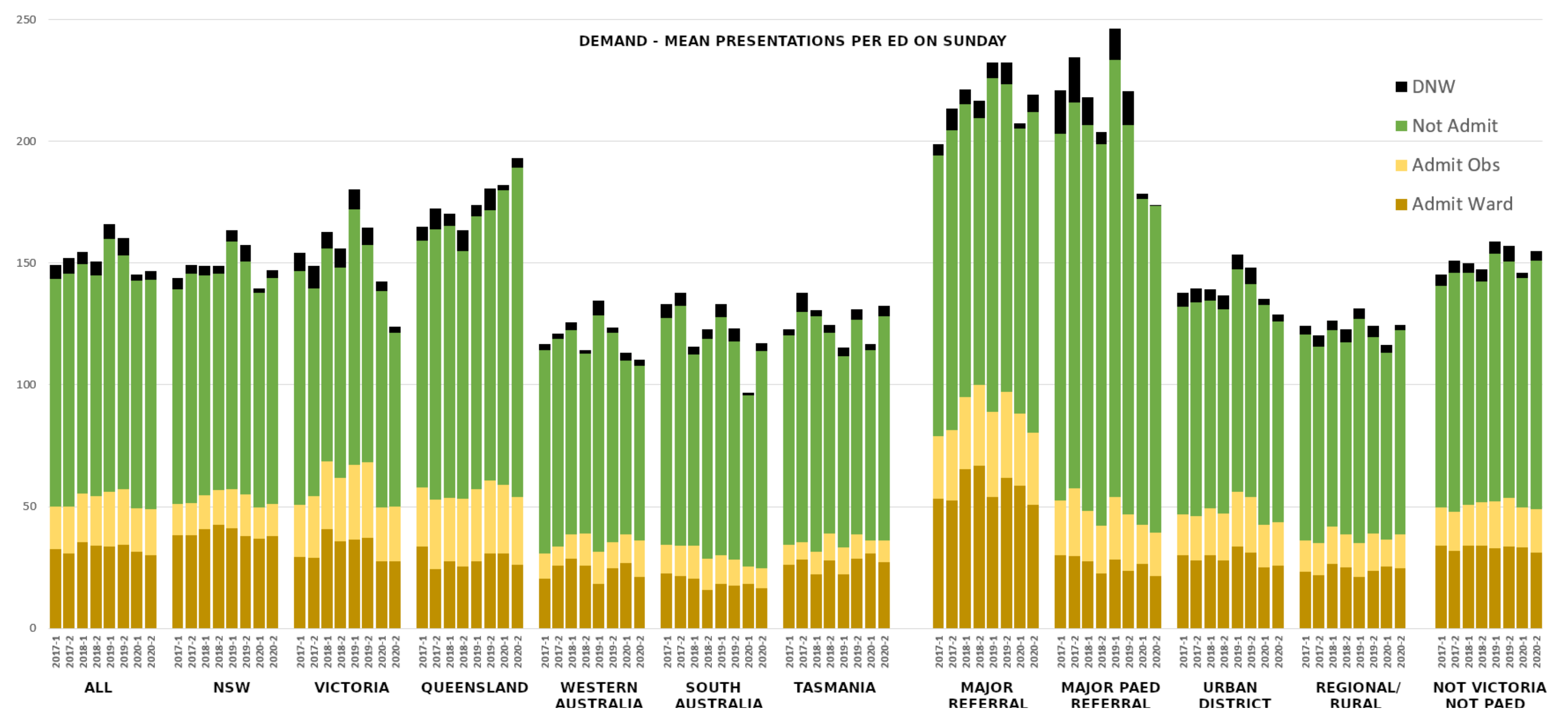
- To describe recent Australian Emergency Department (ED) workload using these data, and to identify any impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

METHODS

- Retrospective analysis of demand and occupancy data provided 2017–2020
- Hospitals answering all surveys were grouped and compared by jurisdiction and role delineation using the paired t-test

RESULTS

- 121 EDs were eligible, 63% supplied complete occupancy data and 53% complete demand data
- Between the June 2017 and 2019 surveys, mean daily ED presentations increased by 11.4% ($P = 0.0003$), whilst the number being treated at 10:00 hours rose by 27.7% ($P < 0.0001$) and those experiencing access block (waiting for an inpatient bed, been in ED more than 8 h) rose by 46.1% ($P = 0.001$)
- Between the June 2019 and 2020 surveys, ED presentations fell by an average of 12.6% ($P < 0.0001$), ward admissions were almost unchanged (-6.0% , $P = \text{NS}$), and patients who did not wait to be seen fell by 57.8% ($P < 0.0001$)
- Major Paediatric Referral hospitals reported a 28% decrease in presentations in June 2020
- By September 2020, only the state of Victoria (ongoing state of emergency) and Major Paediatric Referral hospitals reported demand lower than 2019 or occupancy lower than 2018
- The graphs show results over 4 years (8 surveys): ACT and NT had insufficient submissions over time to be included in the jurisdictional breakdown



DISCUSSION

- Increase in demand and observation unit admissions consistent with other reports
- Greatest drop in Paediatric workload during pandemic also reported elsewhere
- Peak in demand in June 2019 likely due to early severe influenza season
- Peak in occupancy in September 2019 concerning because rose faster than demand
- Difference in jurisdictional approaches to 24-hour stays seen between Vic and Tas

LIMITATIONS

- Possible participation bias
- Reliant on local interpretation of study definitions
- No demographic data collected

CONCLUSIONS

- Occupancy increased by more than demand 2017–2019, with some decrease in 2020
- By the September 2020 survey activity was back to the normal range outside Victorian and Major Paediatric Referral hospitals

