

# PARLIAMENT OF THE PROVINCE OF THE WESTERN CAPE

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## QUESTIONS FOR WRITTEN REPLY

FRIDAY, 27 JUNE 2025

**1. Ms R Windvogel to ask Ms M M Wenger, Minister of Health and Wellness:**

(a) What is the current surgical backlog in the province, (b) what (i) is the number and (ii) are the details of the patients waiting for surgery (aa) for more than 12 months, (bb) between 36 and 60 months and (cc) for more than 60 months and (c) what are the reason or reasons for these delays?

(302)

## RESPONSE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND WELLNESS

(a) The total surgical backlog in the province currently stands at 99,979 patients.

(b)(i) Of this total, 87,975 patients have been waiting for more than 12 months. And 20,027 patients have been on the waiting list for more than 60 months.

(b)(ii) These patients are awaiting a wide range of surgical procedures, covering multiple disciplines and levels of care. The waiting lists include elective surgeries that range from routine day-case procedures to more complex operations requiring specialised surgical teams and facilities.

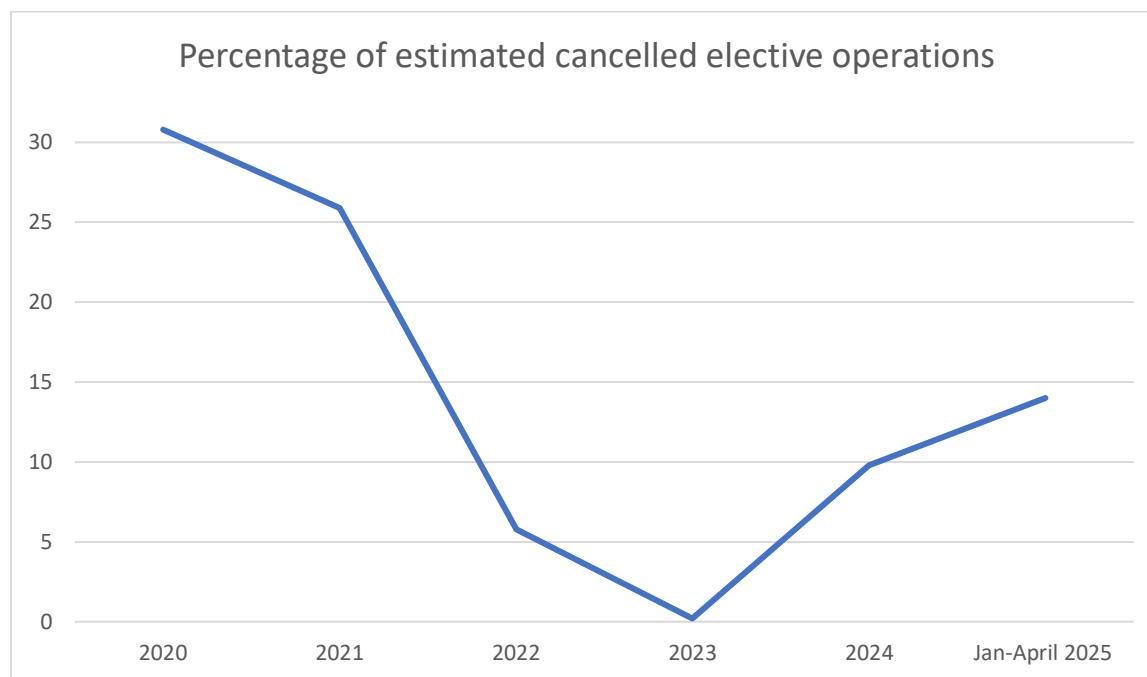
c) The primary reason for the current backlog is the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic, particularly during the period from early 2020 to early 2022. During this time, surgeons, anaesthetists, and theatre nurses were redeployed to manage the high number of patients admitted with Covid-19, especially in intensive care units, high care, and general

wards. As a result, only emergency surgeries were performed, and the majority of elective procedures were postponed.

Following the Pandemic, there was a concerted effort to ramp up surgical activity. By 2023, the number of operations had returned to pre-Covid levels, and progress was being made in addressing the backlog. However, this momentum was disrupted in 2024 due to budgetary constraints linked to national austerity measures. These constraints led to staffing shortages and reduced theatre availability, slowing down the recovery of surgical capacity.

In 2025, with some improvement in the budgetary situation, the department has renewed its focus on increasing surgical throughput and reducing the backlog. Efforts are underway to restore access to timely surgical care and address the accumulated delays in a structured and sustainable manner.

The below graph shows the percentage of estimated cancelled elective operations since 2020 until April 2025. It demonstrates the significant impact that the Covid-19 pandemic had on the number of cancelled elective operations, the gains made in reducing cancelled elective operations and then the increase seen by austerity.



**MINISTER OF HEALTH AND WELLNESS**

**DATE**