

Understanding the characteristics and management of people who frequently attend emergency department with potentially avoidable presentations: suburb of residence.

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Background

Over the past decade, emergency department (ED) presentations at Ballarat Health Services (BHS) have increased at a rate much faster than local population growth. People who frequently attend ED (≥ 5 presentations in a 12-month period) with health problems that could be managed outside of the ED, by a general practitioner or other health/community care service (i.e. potentially avoidable presentations) account for a disproportionate number of ED attendances. The aim of our study was to understand the characteristics and management of people who frequently attend the ED with potentially avoidable presentations.

Methods

A retrospective audit was conducted of routinely collected data for people (≥ 18 years) who frequently attended the BHS ED between 1 January 2009 and 31 December 2018.

Demographic, health service utilization and clinical data were collected. Geographical information system (GIS) mapping of residential data was conducted to understand the relationship to proximate geographical community and health care providers external to BHS.

Results

The number of people who frequently present to ED annually has increased from 749 to 1073 between 2009-2018.

The majority of ED presentations were by people who resided in Sebastopol, followed by Wendouree, Ballarat, Delacombe, and Alfredton. ED presentations from Sebastopol, Wendouree, Delacombe and Alfredton increased over the 10-year period, but declined for Ballarat (Figure 1).

Total number of visits per year by frequent presenters increased from 5241 (15.1% of all adult ED presentations) in 2009 to 8051 (18.8%) in 2018 (Figure 2).

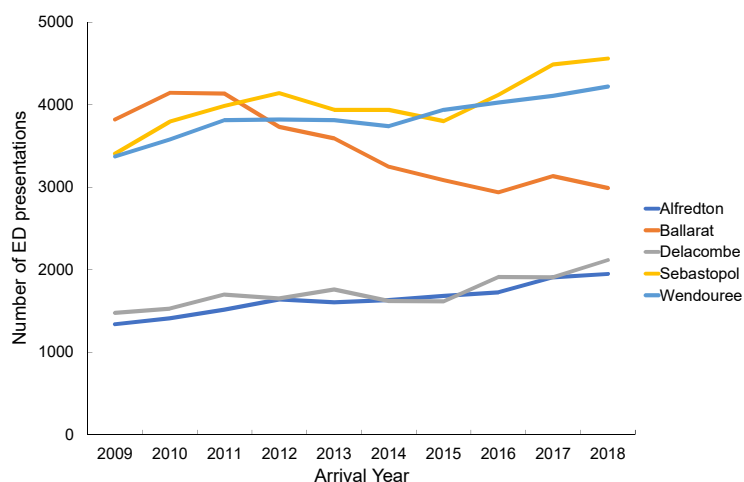


Figure 1. Number of presentations to BHS ED categorized by the top five suburbs.

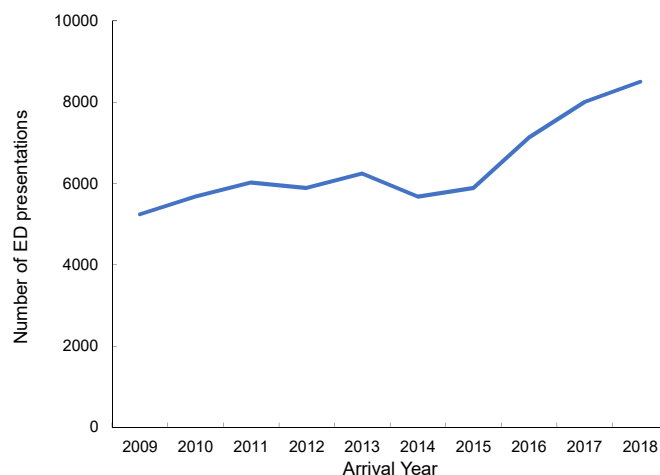


Figure 2. Number of ED presentations by frequent presenters, 2009-2018.



Conclusion

People who frequently attend the ED account for an increasing proportion of all ED visits. Analysis regarding the characteristics of people who frequently present will inform targeted strategies to prevent avoidable visits to the ED.

GIS mapping indicates that people may be bypassing services to attend the BHS ED. Interventions are needed to improve the management of this cohort and reduce the demand for service in the ED.