



NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION

# MEDIA RELEASE

General Secretary: Brett Holmes | Assistant General Secretary: Judith Kiejda

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31 July, 2014

## Health Minister told: Do the right thing, put patient safety first

Nurses and midwives from across NSW have called on the state's Health Minister Jillian Skinner to deliver improved and expanded nurse-to-patient ratios throughout the public health system as a matter of urgency.

Mrs Skinner was greeted to the NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association's (NSWNMA) 69th annual conference underway at Rosehill Gardens by 430 delegates with one clear message: *Ratios, put patient safety first.*

Delegates presented Mrs Skinner with a petition of more than 10,000 signatures from residents across the state who are in support of improved nurse-to-patient ratios being rolled out.

General Secretary of the NSWNMA, Brett Holmes, said the delegates were adamant they would continue to lobby Mrs Skinner over her government's duty of care and to fight for better health outcomes on behalf of their patients.

"Our members were successful in campaigning for nurse-to-patient ratios which were introduced into many of the state's public hospitals in 2011 as part of negotiations on their wages and working conditions agreement, but the fight for extended ratios is ongoing," Mr Holmes said.

"Their resolve is to continue fighting for expanded nurse-to-patient ratio into all public health facilities and specialty units including emergency departments, neonatal intensive care units, critical care, children's wards, community health and more country hospitals to ensure patients are receiving the best possible care."

Last Friday, 179 public health system branches voted in favour of the NSWNMA to continue the fight for patient safety, fair industrial laws and a vibrant and equitable public health system in NSW. The resolution also expressed anger at the NSW government for using its unjust industrial relations laws to block bargaining for wages and conditions:

*We further note they have forced upon us an inadequate 2.27% increase. We condemn the actions of the Government, its outlawing of genuine Award negotiations and the removal of the independent umpire's powers.*

The NSWNMA agreed with its members to maintain pressure on all political parties in the lead up to the next state election in March 2015, as part of its ongoing nurse-to-patient ratios campaign.

As a result of continued pressure from rural and regional NSWNMA members, Mrs Skinner announced the state government would commit to supporting 30 new full-time equivalent (FTE) positions for smaller acute facilities, to provide a supernumerary nursing resource to help cope with unexpected demands.



The Health Minister reiterated that 1,000 community nursing staff would receive handheld tablets to enhance their capacity and to better integrate hospital and community services across regional settings.

Mrs Skinner announced additional support within smaller acute hospitals and mental health units through the employment of 30 new Clinical Support Officers, allowing nurses and midwives to focus on delivering patient care. The state government has also committed to improve support for Nurse Practitioners, with a project underway to expand numbers and further enhance their clinical roles.

The NSWNMA delegates welcomed the Minister's minor funding and resources commitments, but were sceptical of their impact on safe patient care unless legally guaranteed in the current wages and conditions Award. The Minister's announcement would only deliver the equivalent of just 3.75 FTE positions per Local Health District across rural NSW.

As part of the final day of the conference tomorrow, two international guest speakers will discuss the important role nurse-to-patient ratios have played in parts of the United States.

Californian nurse and Vice President of National Nurses United, Malinda Markowitz, will also talk about the need to maintain Australia's universal public healthcare system rather than shifting to an Americanised user-pays managed care system.

Ms Markowitz will be joined by California Nurses Association member, Britta Houser, who will reflect on her role as an emergency nurse in Oakland, California, as well as the important role nurses and midwives play as advocates for improved health outcomes in society.

The NSWNMA's 69th annual conference at Rosehill Gardens Grand Pavilion concludes tomorrow, Friday, August 1.

## **\*\* Media Alert \*\***

*Media are welcome to attend the NSWNMA's 69<sup>th</sup> annual conference in the Grand Pavilion at Rosehill Gardens, enter via Gate One (NB: Notices of motion and Association general business are closed to media). Highlights will include:*

### **FRIDAY, 1 AUGUST 2014**

**11.00am to 11.30am** – Lee Thomas, Federal Secretary ANMF and Annie Butler, Assistant Federal Secretary ANMF

**11.30am to 12.45pm** – Malinda Markowitz, Vice President of National Nurses United and Britta Houser, California Nurses Association

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