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## Ratios overlooked as NSW Budget focuses on bricks and mortar

The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) has described the 2015-16 NSW Budget as a mixed bag for the state's hardworking public sector nurses and midwives.

General Secretary of the NSWNMA, Brett Holmes, welcomed the re-elected Baird Government's efforts to deliver on its election commitments in the Budget, but noted it had left out important measures to improve the delivery of safe patient care – nurse to patient ratios.

"A key element of the health budget expenditure is a much needed \$1.4 billion investment in public hospital infrastructure, however, hospitals are simply empty buildings if they don't have the nurses, midwives and other medical, allied health and support staff to care for patients," Mr Holmes said.

"The government has confirmed it's expecting an increase of 90,000 emergency department attendances during the next financial year, or growth of 3.3 per cent, yet there's still no guaranteed commitment for a ratio of one nurse for every three patients in our EDs.

"We'd be more than happy to talk with the Ministry of Health about how many extra nurses and midwives are needed to help make the current public health system work efficiency and ensure better health outcomes for patients," he said.

The Baird Government has confirmed at least 2,100 extra full-time equivalent nurses and midwives will be employed over the next four years, almost half the number the government reportedly recruited during its first term of government (4,000 FTE). An extra 40,000 patients are expected to receive inpatient care in the next year alone, so we know nurses and midwives will be stretched to the limit.

Fortunately, a further \$9.3 million dollars has also been allocated for 360 FTE new specialised nursing, midwifery and support staff by 2019.

Mr Holmes said despite forecasting Budget surpluses over the forward estimates, the Baird Government was standing by its draconian wages policy and confirmed public sector wages would continue to be capped at 2.5 per cent. Unfortunately, our claims for better and extended nurse to patient ratios are also captured by the government's cap.

"We've repeatedly attempted to negotiate with this government, on behalf of thousands of hardworking nurses and midwives, to no avail and they've confirmed in the budget papers that wages growth will continue to be restrained, regardless of any inflation changes," said Mr Holmes.

The NSWNMA also raised concern over a lack of detail in the Budget on how the Baird Government planned to address looming shortfalls in Commonwealth health funding from 2017.

"Last year, the state government miraculously managed to absorb a \$200 million black hole as a result of federal health funding cuts, but we know that more pain is on the way thanks to the Abbott Government reneging on a host of National Partnership Agreements," Mr Holmes said.



“In NSW, we’re still facing a \$1.5 billion shortfall over the two years to 2018-19 in federal health funding.”

Mr Holmes said the NSWNMA was pleased with provisions for medical cannabis trials for children with severe epilepsy, terminally ill adults and chemotherapy patients, as well as the improvements outlined for paediatric research.

Mr Holmes said overall the Budget was a mixed bag for the public sector nursing and midwifery workforce and reiterated that the NSWNMA would continue to campaign for legally enforceable ratios to be introduced across NSW.

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